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MEMOIRS

OF

ROSSINI.

Gioachino Rossini.

January

1824.

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OF

ROSSINI.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

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NOTE

BY THE TRANSLATOR.

In the perusal of the following pages, the reader will meet with certain observations unfavourable to the professional talents of Madame Colbran Rossini, a lady who, for a number of years, has filled the situation of *prima donna* in Italy, and has been honoured with distinguished approbation. The Translator takes this opportunity of reminding the Reader, that, as these are the sentiments of an anonymous author,—for the different names he has chosen to assume are proofs of the fact,—no higher degree of importance attaches to them than as the opinions of an individual; opinions to be received with caution, and regarded only in the light of an *ex-parte* statement, which may hereafter be rebutted by contrary evidence.

The Translator begs leave to state, that the anecdotes relative to Signor Rossini's journey to Vienna, in 1822, contained in Chapter xvth, as well as some further information relative to his later operas, have partly been gleaned from

foreign Journals, and in part obtained from some of the friends of the composer.

It may also be proper to inform the Reader who is not acquainted with the original, that some liberties have been taken with the Author's text, relative to certain points of a religious, political, and local nature; which, as not bearing upon the leading subject of the Memoirs, it has been judged advisable to omit.

Indulgence is, at the same time, to be requested for some few errors that have unavoidably crept into the text: the apology must be the haste with which the work was carried through the press.

London; Jan. 2, 1824.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

PREFACE . . . . . PAGE xiii.

INTRODUCTION.—Era of the *beau ideal* in music—Cimarosa—Paisiello—History of the *inter-regnum* between Cimarosa and Rossini, from 1800 to 1812—Mayer—critical view of his talents and principal productions—Paër—account of his principal works—Mozart in Italy—anecdote of the method taken to introduce there a taste for his works—remarks on the style of Mozart—difference between the style of Mozart, Cimarosa, and Rossini. page xix.

CHAPTER I.—Rossini's family—born at Pesaro, 1792—an Italian education—studies under Angelo Tesei—Goes on his musical tour—composes a cantata in 1808, and the operas of *Demetrio e Polibio*, in 1809; *La Cambiale di Matrimonio*, 1810; *L'Equivoco Stravaganti*, in 1811; *L'Inganno Felice*, in 1812; *Ciro in Babylonia*, an oratorio—Rossini accepts an engagement at Venice—*La Scala di Seta*—anecdote of this opera—*L'Occasione fa il Ladro; Il Figlio per Azzardo*, all in the same year. page 1

CHAP. II.—1813. Rossini at Venice—*Tancredi*, Rossini's first *opera seria*—anecdote relative to the air "*Di tanti palpiti*"—*Harmony* sustains the same part in music, that *description* does in the romances of Sir W. Scott—reply of a critic—remarks on *Tancredi*—Rossini and the *prima donna* page 13

CHAP. III.—1813. Rossini at Venice continued—*L'Italiana in Algeri*—remarks on this opera—the *libretto* (book of the opera)—political allusions—anecdote of Rossini's indolence . . . page 27

CHAP. IV.—1813. Rossini at Milan—*La Pietra del Paragone* (the Touchstone)—an Italian *impressario* (director)—plot of *La Pietra del Paragone*—it obtains the name of *Sigillara*, and why—anecdote of Marcolini and her successful rival—situation of Lombardy, in 1813—account of *La Pietra del Paragone* concluded—the journalist—anecdote of Marcolini—Rossini steals the idea of his *crescendo* from the composer Mosca . . . . page 39

CHAP. V.—1813. Rossini revisits Pesaro—remarks on his character—escapes the conscription, in consideration of his talents—the critics of Bologna—Rossini's reply to their observations—Envy—M. Berton of the Institute—his remarks on Rossini—laconic reply to them—Rossini's adventure with the Princess C—, of Bologna . . . page 53

CHAP. VI.—The *impressario* and his theatre—mode of getting up an opera—Rossini's reading—his mode of life—his singular hours for composition—anecdote of his quickness in taking a useful hint—his hatred of pedantry—anecdote of Rossini and

the Cardinal—picture of an Italian green-room—Italian singers—comedy of Sografi on their peculiarities of character — Marchesi — Crivelli — *La prima sera* (the first evening of a new opera)—Rossini's mode of travelling—his waggery. page 61

Chap. VII.—1814. Rossini accepts an engagement at Milan—*Aureliano in Palmira*—the progress of taste—Harmony *versus* Melody—period of musical revolutions—date of the eras of the principal Italian composers—a comparison—probability of the union of the Italian and German schools—On musical *science*—Rossini marks his errors of grammar with a ×—On the present state of the musical grammar—M. Lavoisier—On musical rules—complicated accompaniments intrude on the province of song—those of Rossini offend rather by their *quantity* than *quality*—Family of the Monbelli—Theatre at Como—*Demetrio e Polibio*—account of this opera, the first composed by Rossini . . . . . page 77

Chap. VIII.—Rossini at Milan continued—*Il Turco in Italia*—anecdote of the *buffo* Paccini—Galli the bass—account of *Il Turco in Italia* concluded—not successful on the first representation. page 97

Chap. IX.—1815. Rossini accepts an engagement at Naples—Anecdotes of M. Barbaja—King Ferdinand—Signora Colbran—loses her voice—how received by the Neapolitans—*L'Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra*—plot of this opera—Signora Colbran's powers in this character—remarks of the Neapolitan critics on Rossini's style—his reply—hack overture—comparison between the *Scala* and

San Carlo—anecdote of a Neapolitan family—cause of Rossini's errors in style . . page 103

Chap. X.—1816. Rossini at Rome—*Torvaldo e Dorliska* unsuccessful—*Il Barbiere di Seviglia*——anecdote of the *libretto*—Rossini brought into competition with Paisiello—writes to this composer—his reply—account of the *Barbiere di Seviglia*—condemned on the first representation—Rossini's adventures at Rome—Cardinal Golzalvi—anecdote relative to the bust of Cimarosa—concluding observations on the *Barbiere* . . . . page 125

Chap. XI.—1816. Rossini returns to Naples—*San-Carlo*—Signora Colbran—*L'Otello*—remarks on this opera—Romance in the last scene—The *jettatura* at Naples—story of Stradella and Hortensia . . . . . page 141

Chap. XII.—1817. Rossini returns to Rome—*Cenerentola*—Rossini proceeds to Milan—*La Gazza Ladra*—remarks on this opera—the cavatina "*Di piacer*"—observations on it—Madame Bellochi—Waltz at the conclusion of the *Gazza Ladra*——anecdote of Rossini and Galli . . page 159

Chap. XIII.—1818. Rossini returns to Naples—*Armida*—*Adelaide di Borgogna*—*Adina, osia il Califfo di Bagdad*—*Mosè in Egitto*—remarks on this opera—absurdities in the manner of representation—Anecdote of Rossini and the poet Tottola—Powerful effect produced by the prayer "*Dal tuo stellato soglio*"—Comparison between Rossini and Goëthe—Observations . . . . . page 170

CHAP. XIV.—Of the revolution caused by Rossini in song—on describing the characteristic traits of different singers—strong feeling indispensible in the Fine Arts—Canova—requisites in order to enjoy the true beautiful in music—disappointed composers turn critics—state of singing when Rossini began his career—Rossini and Velluti—Rossini and Colbran—Operas in Rossini's *second manner*, page 184

CHAP. XV.—1819. *Ricciardo e Zoraide*—account of this opera—*Ermione*—remarks on this opera—*Odoardo e Cristina*—anecdote of this opera—*La Donna del Lago*—unsuccessful on the first representation, but succeeds on the second—*Gasconism* of Rossini—Remarks on the *Donna del Lago*—Rossini composes a mass at Naples . page 204

CHAP. 16.—1820. Rossini goes to Milan—*Bianca e Faliero*—Decoration of the *Scala*—Rossini returns to Naples—produces his *Maometto Secondo*—unsuccessful—goes to Rome for the carnival of 1821, and gives his *Matilda di Shabran*—returns to Naples in the spring of 1822, and produces his *Zelmira*—account of this opera—writes a pastorale, entitled *La Riconoscenza*, performed for his benefit at *San-Carlo*—goes to Bologna—marries Signora Colbran—remarks—accepts an engagement at Vienna—makes his debût with *Cenerentola*—anecdote—opinions of the Germans relative to Rossini—honours shown him at Vienna—whimsical anecdote—Rossini returns to Venice—dispute with the managers—*Maometto* condemned—an enraged audience—Rossini makes his peace with the public by the

new opera of *Semiramide*—difficulty of forming an opinion of the relative merits of Rossini's operas—the cause of this difficulty—Rossini borrows from himself—decisive failure necessary to teach him humility—Rossini in London—Hint to the manager of the King's Theatre . . . . . page 219

Chap. 17.—On the style of Rossini—he does not paint with truth the passion of love—circumstances that made him change his style—errors of the public in forming their opinions—Rossini encroaches upon the province of the singer—remarks on some of the principal great singers—their relative capacities—impossible for a master to invent ornaments equally suited to every voice—a due latitude should be left to the taste and feelings of the singer—Madame Pasta—peculiarities of her voice—hints to Rossini respecting it—The *arie di baule* (baggage airs)—Rossini's music being composed for particular voices, loses much of its effect in other theatres . . . . . page 242

Chap. 18.—Opinions of Rossini relative to contemporary composers—Cimarosa—Cherubini—Mayer—Pavesi—Fioravanti—Guglielmi—observations—Mozart—Orgitano—Paisiello—Rossini's conversation—anecdotes—Rossini's talent at mimickry—anecdote of his facility in composing—his character—concluding observations . . . . page 299

A Chronological List of Rossini's Works, &c. . . . . page 274

PREFACE.

THERE is no man, who, during the last twelve years, has been more frequently the subject of conversation. from Moscow to Naples, from London to Vienna, from Paris to Calcutta, than the subject of these memoirs. His glory already knows no other bounds than those of civilization, and yet he has scarcely attained his thirty-second year.

The object of the following pages is to attempt a sketch of the circumstances that have tended to place him, at so early an age, on such a point of eminence.

The title upon which the present writer founds his claim to the confidence of the reader, is his having resided during the last ten years, in

the cities which Rossini has delighted by the master-pieces of his art. The author has journeyed many a league, in order to be present at the first representation of several of his operas; he has, therefore, been placed in the way of hearing all the little anecdotes current in society, as well at Milan and Venice, as at Rome and Naples, at the time these operas were claiming the public attention.

The author of this work has also written two or three others, mostly upon subjects of a light nature. The critics have told him, that, before putting pen to paper, he ought to have furnished himself with certain oratorical and academical requisites, &c.—that he would never be able to make a book, &c.—that he would never have the honour to be a man of letters. Well, be it so, and yet certain persons whom I leave it to

the public to name, have so modified the latter title, that certain other persons may, perhaps, think themselves very lucky in never being honoured with it.

Let the present book, therefore, be considered as no book at all. After the fall of Napoleon, the writer, unwilling to pass the best season of his life a dupe to political animosities, set out upon his rambles through the world. Finding himself in Italy at the time Rossini was enjoying such extraordinary success, and being then engaged in a correspondence with some friends in England and Poland, this subject náturally formed a prominent feature in it.

It is from the letters written at this period, that the author has, in a great measure, drawn the materials which form the present volume: it will not be read from any merits of its

own, but merely from the interest that is felt with regard to Rossini. In whatever manner, say they, his history be written, it cannot fail to please, and the greater portion of the present materials were collected on the spot, and while the little events they record possessed a living interest.

I make no doubt but that some inaccuracies will be found amidst the variety of little details that fill the following pages. It is no easy task to write the memoirs of a cotemporary, much less those of Rossini, whose life leaves few other traces than the recollection of the agreeable sensations which he has awakened in our minds. It were to be wished that this great artist, who is, at the same time, one of the most agreeable of men, had undertaken the task of writing his own Memoirs, after the manner of Goldoni. As he is pos-

sessed of a hundred times more wit than Goldoni, and never waives his joke upon any occasion, his Memoirs could not have been otherwise than piquant and interesting. All I hope is, that the present life of Rossini may be found incorrect enough to put him out of humour with my temerity, and stimulate him to write one himself. But, before he does get out of humour, let me hasten to assure him that I feel the highest respect for his person and talents; more, indeed, than for any other man living, however great his wealth, or exalted his rank. The latter—to use a phrase of Rossini's own—has gained a prize in the lottery of fortune, while he himself has gained the same in the lottery of nature;—and I may be allowed to add, a prize, the value of which no years will impair.

Montmorency, Sept. 30, 1823.

INTRODUCTION.

To enable the reader to form a correct idea of the talents of Rossini, and the rank he is entitled to hold in the art, it will be proper to take a rapid view of the *inter-regnum* that took place between Cimarosa and the subject of the present memoir, from 1800 to 1812.

It is a melancholy reflection, but the truth of which cannot, after due examination, be called in question, that the *beau ideal* of music undergoes a change about every thirty years. Hence, in seeking to give a correct idea of the revolution brought about by Rossini, it will not be necessary to revert to a more distant epoch than that of Cimarosa and Paisiello.

Cimarosa died at Venice, the 11th of January, 1801, in consequence of the barbarous treatment he had experienced at Naples, where, on account of his having devoted his talents to celebrate the new state of things, he was doomed to linger for some time in prison.

Paisiello died only in 1816; but it may with truth be said, that, during the present century,

the genius of the amiable and graceful, rather than brilliant and energetic, author of "*Il Re Teodoro*," and "*La Scuffiara*," had ceased to be productive. The musical talent developes itself early, and but too frequently is as rapidly extinguished.

Cimarosa produces an impression on the imagination by long musical periods, which, to great richness, unite great regularity. In proof of this, I might cite the two first duets of the "*Matrimonio secreto;*" and particularly the second, "*Io ti lascio perche finiti.*" These airs are the most beautiful that the human mind can conceive; but they are perfectly *regular*, and it is a regularity which the mind perceives without an effort. This is the misfortune: once acquainted with one or two of his airs, we know the rest, and, from the very beginning, foresee in some measure all that is to follow. The whole mischief lies in this word *foresee*, and it is in the secret of avoiding this error, that we shall find much of the success and glory of Rossini to consist.

Paisiello has not the power to awaken such profound emotions as Cimarosa; the images he awakens in the mind of his hearers seldom rise beyond the *graceful;* but he is admirable in this respect. His grace is that of Corregio, tender, rarely piquant, but seductive and irresistible. In proof of this I might adduce the quartett from "*La Molinara*," "*Quelli là.*" Paisiello has the

remarkable custom of repeating the same trait in an air several times over, and yet every time with a fresh grace, that impresses it more forcibly on the mind of the hearers. Nothing is more opposite to the style of Cimarosa, sparkling with fancy, and full of energy and passion. Rossini also repeats himself, but he does it not expressly; what is a grace in Paisiello, is but indolence with him. But, lest I should be ranked among the detractors of this amiable man, I hasten to add, that he alone, among the moderns, deserves to be compared to the two great masters who ceased to shine towards the commencement of the nineteenth century.

After Cimarosa, and when Paisiello had ceased to write, music languished in Italy, and felt the want of an original genius. Rossini had composed something previous to 1812, but it was not till this year that he found an opportunity of composing for the grand theatre of Milan. In order to form a just estimate of his talents, we must take a rapid view of the composers who obtained any success from 1810 till 1812. After Cimarosa, and before the appearance of Rossini, two names present themselves, Mayer and Paër.

Mayer, a German, who finished his education in Italy, and has resided for a number of years at Bergamo, has written some fifty operas between 1795 and 1820, and obtained considerable success. There is much in his works to surprise and to please the ear. His talent prin-

cipally consists in his orchestra, and the rich stores of harmony, which he has lavished to profusion in his *ritornellos*,* and the accompaniments of his airs. If his *fort* does not lie in making the human voice sing, at least he has made his instruments speak.

His "*Lodoiska*," given in 1800, eclipsed all the music of that period. This was followed, in 1801, by "*Le due Gironate;*" and, in 1802, by the "*Misteri Eleusini*," which made as much noise in that day, as "*Il Don Giovanni*" has in our own; but the latter opera was not then known in Italy, and was considered as of too difficult execution. "*I Misteri Eleusini*," passed for the most brilliant and powerful work of that period. The march of the art was extraordinary; rapid strides were made from melody to harmony. The Italian masters quitted the *easy* and the *simple*, for the *difficult* and the *learned*.

Messrs. Mayer and Paër, being possessed of profound science, made a grand *dash*, and accomplished that which the other *maestri* only attempted with timidity, and by committing at every step a hundred faults against grammar. This gave these composers a false air of genius; and what tended to complete the illusion was, that they were really possessed of considerable talent.

It was a misfortune for these authors that

* Introductory symphonies to an air.

Rossini came ten years too early. The epoch of a composer's musical era is, as we before remarked, limited to a period of about thirty years; these masters have, therefore, to lament that it was not allowed them quietly to finish their stated period. Had Rossini not appeared till 1820, Messrs. Mayer and Paër might have figured in the annals of music, and ranked with a Leo, a Durante, a Scarlatti, &c. great masters of the first order, who enjoyed their period of renown.

Mayer is the most learned, as well as the most prolific, master of the *inter-regnum;* every thing with him is correct and according to rule. You may examine all the scores of his "*Medea*," "*Cora*," "*Adelasio*," and "*Elisa*" without finding a single fault. It is the desperate perfection of a Boileau; one cannot imagine why one is not moved. Pass from this to an opera of Rossini, and you find yourself at once in the fresh and pure air of the Alps; you seem to breathe more at large; you at once feel the difference between the productions of genius and those of science. The young composer scatters abroad his ideas with a liberal hand; sometimes he is successful, at others he fails of his object. It is all negligence, all disorder; it is a thoughtless squandering of riches that have no end. To sum up all in one word, Mayer is the most correct composer; Rossini the greater artist. Mayer is to music, what Johnson was to

English prose; he created a powerful and emphatic manner of his own, which was very far from nature and true beauty, but which nevertheless has its merit, and pleases, especially when we become accustomed to it. But Rossini came with his more free and natural style, and at once drew off the attention of the world from the ponderous magnificence of Mayer. Such is the fate that awaits all affectation in the fine arts: nature and true beauty are sure to predominate in the end, and the world feels astonished how it could have been a dupe so long.

M. Paër, in spite of his German name, is a native of Parma; and, after M. Mayer, is, of all the composers of the *inter-regnum*, the one that has enjoyed the greatest success. This, independent of his great and incontestable talents, may be attributed to other causes. He is a man of very agreeable manners, much wit, and considerable address. His being able to keep the Parisians for eight years strangers to Rossini, is cited as a proof of the eminent degree in which he excels in the latter qualification. For, if ever there was a composer formed to please the French, it is Rossini; Rossini is the Voltaire of music.

One of the first productions of M. Paër, is "*L'Oro fa tutto*," which was composed in 1793. "*La Griselda*," his *chef-d'œuvre*, appeared in 1797. But why speak of an opera that has made the tour of Europe? Besides this, all the world

admires "*Sargine*," which was produced in 1803. I should not hesitate to rank these two operas above all the rest of M. Paër's productions. "*L'Agnese*" does not appear to me to merit a place in the same class. It owes its success to the powerful fidelity with which it paints one of the severest inflictions with which humanity can be visited. The dreadful spectacle of a father driven to madness by the desertion of his daughter, is calculated to produce a powerful effect upon the mind, and easily dispose it to receive the impressions of music. Galli, Pellegrini, and particularly Ambrogetti, have been sublime in this character. But, however successful the attempt, I cannot but think that the fine arts ought never to avail themselves of subjects of horror. The filial piety of Cordelia consoles me for the madness of Lear; but nothing can render the frightful situation to which the father of *Agnese* is reduced, supportable. Music only serves to double our sensibility, and to render the scene more painful, by giving it an additional reality.

After speaking thus in full of the two leading names of this period, it only remains to give a list of composers of secondary abilities: they are as follows:—Anfossi, Coccia, Farinelli, Federici, Fioravanti, Generali, the two Guglielmi (father and son), Manfroce, Martini, Mosca, Nazolini, Nicolini, Orgitano, Orlandi,

Pavesi, Portogallo, Salieri, Sarti, Tarchi, Trento, Weigl, Winter, Zingarelli.

The reader will doubtless be surprised to find me introducing the name of Mozart, as belonging to this period: I intreat his indulgence till he hears the reasons that have induced me so to do. While the musical scene in Italy was occupied by the composers above named, who all flattered themselves with being the legitimate successors of Cimarosa and Paisiello; and at the moment the public were beginning to persuade themselves of the same, a colossus was suddenly seen to appear in the midst of these lesser composers, who were only great by the absence of great men.

Mayer, Paër, and their imitators, had for a long time been endeavouring to adapt the German to the Italian taste, and, as half-measures please the feeble-minded of both parties, they gained considerable success with those whose admiration is not difficult of attainment. Mozart, on the contrary, like all great artists, had no other wish than to please himself, and those of his stamp: he never once dreamed of flattering or being flattered.

Besides, his personal presence was wanted; he was not there to pay his court to the great,—to bribe the venal journalist, in order to have his name in every mouth: the consequence was, that, till after his death, he was scarcely known

beyond the limits of Germany. His rivals were always on the spot,—wrote their music for the voices of particular actors,—composed little duos for the prince's mistress,—and found a thousand other little ways of securing interest and protection: and, yet, what is one of their operas when placed by the side of Mozart? Nay, the public feeling in Italy, about the year 1800, was altogether the reverse of favorable. At that time Mozart was considered little better than a romantic barbarian, who sought to invade the classical territory of the fine arts. It must not be imagined that this revolution, which seems so very simple now it is brought about, took place in a day.

Mozart, when still a lad, had composed two operas for the theatre of the *Scala* at Milan: "*Mitradate*," in 1770, and "*Lucio Silla*," in 1773.* These operas were not wanting in success; but it is not probable that a lad of fourteen could stem the current of fashion. Besides, whatever might be the merit of these works, they were soon swallowed up in the torrent, and overwhelmed by the then all-powerful names of Sacchini, Piccini, and Paisiello.

About the year 1803, the news of the splendid triumphs which Mozart's music was obtaining at Munich and Vienna, reached the ears of the

* Mozart was born at Saltzburg, in 1756, and died at Vienna, in 1792. When he wrote his "*Mitradate*," he was but fourteen.

dilettanti of Italy. At first it excited some little commotion, but it was soon quieted by their resolute incredulity. A barbarian reap laurels in the field of the arts! They had long been acquainted with his Symphonies and Quartettos; but, Mozart compose music for the voice! The same was said of him in Italy, as had been said of Shakspeare in France, by the partisans of the old system. "He is a barbarian, not wanting in energy; some grains of gold were found in the refuse of Ennius; had he but been fortunate enough to profit by the lessons of Zingarelli or Paisiello, he might have done something." They contented themselves with these observations, and nothing further was said respecting Mozart.

In 1807, some Italians of distinction, whom Napoleon had taken into his suite, and whom circumstances brought to Munich, fell into conversation about Mozart; the result of which was, that they came to a resolution of trying one of his pieces,—the "*Entführung dem Serail*," I believe. But, to do justice to this opera, it was requisite to be a perfect symphonist; above all, it was necessary to be an excellent timist, and never to take any liberty with the text. It was no longer a question of music that can be repeated by rote, on hearing it sung once or twice over, like the "*C'est l'Amour*;" or the "*Di tanti palpiti*." The Italian symphonists set to work, but nothing could they make of the

ocean of notes that blackened the score of this northern artist. Above all, it was necessary that time should be scrupulously observed; that they should *start together* and *come out* at the last note, exactly at a given moment. Indolent amateurs would term such scrupulosity mere barbarism: this word was on the point of escaping from their lips, and they were on the very verge of abandoning Mozart for ever. However, certain young men of consideration, whom I could name, and who had more pride than vanity, could not persuade themselves but that it was ridiculous for Italians to give up music as too difficult. They threatened to withdraw their protection from the theatre, if the German opera, then in rehearsal, was not produced; and at last the work of Mozart was given, but

"Heu! quantum mutatus ab illo."

Poor Mozart! Many of those who were present at this first representation, and who afterwards learnt to set a due value on the works of this great man, have assured me that a more lamentable massacre could hardly be imagined. The concerted pieces, and particularly the finales, produced a cacophony that was altogether alarming: it seemed as if a pandemonium of evil spirits had broke loose. Two or three airs, and a duetto, were the only things that floated above the surface of this ocean of discord.

The same evening two parties were formed.

The *patriotism of the antichamber*, to use the expression of a celebrated critic,—that great moral malady of the Italians,—was aroused in all its fury, and issued its mandate through all the *cafés*, that no man born out of Italy would ever be able to compose a good air. The Chevalier M. was heard to pronounce the following sentence, in that measured solemnity of tone which so strongly characterises him: "*Gli accompagnamenti tedeschi non sono guardie d'onore pell canto, ma gendarmi.*"*

The other party, headed by two or three young officers, who had been at Munich, maintained that there were in Mozart, not only several concerted pieces, but two or three little airs and duets, that had genius,—and, what was more than all, had novelty in them. The sticklers for the national honour had recourse to their grand argument, that a man must be a *bad Italian* who could admire music made by an *ultra-montanist*. In the midst of these contests, the representations of Mozart's opera reached their term, the orchestra playing worse and worse every evening. The better sort of people observed, "As the name of Mozart excites such hatred; as people are so desperate in their resolution to prove that he is mediocre; as we see him loaded with reproaches, from which even Nicolini and Pucitta (two of

* The German accompaniments are not guards of honour to the song, but gendarmes."

the feeblest composers of the day,) have escaped, it is very possible that this stranger may have some genius."

This is what was said in the Contessa Bianca's box, as well as in those of some of the first people of distinction in the town. I pass over in silence the gross abuse lavished in the public journals; every one knows that these were written by the agents of the police. The cause of Mozart seemed lost,—and scandalously lost.

A noble and rich amateur, one of that class of persons who have no great sense of their own, but who contrive to gain all the credit of it, by adopting every six months some paradox, which they furiously maintain on every occasion: this nobleman, having learnt, by a letter from one of his mistresses in Vienna, that Mozart was the first musician in the world, began to talk of it with an air of great mystery. He sent for the six best symphonists of the town, whom he first dazzled by the splendour of his mansion, and amazed by the *fracas* of his English horses, and calashes manufactured in London, and then set them to play over to him, in private, the first finale of "*Il Don Giovanni*." His palace was immense; he immediately gave up to them a whole range of apartments. He threatened vengeance to any one who should dare utter a word about the business; and, when a rich man does this in Italy, there is no danger of his not being obeyed.

It took no less than six months for the prince's

musicians to accomplish their task, and play the first finale of "*Don Giovanni*" in just time. Then, for the first moment, they began to see Mozart. The nobleman engaged six singers, whom he bound down to secrecy. After two months' sedulous practice, they were perfect in their parts. After this, the finales, and the principal concerted pieces of the opera, were rehearsed at the nobleman's country-house, and with all the profound secrecy of a conspiracy. He had an ear, like all the rest of his countrymen, and found the music admirable. Secure of his object, he began to speak of Mozart with less reserve; he allowed himself to be attacked in various quarters; and at length laid a wager, which did not fail to excite universal interest, and to form the grand topic of conversation through the whole of that part of Lombardy. The wager he laid was, that he would cause certain pieces of "*Don Giovanni*" to be executed, and that Messieurs So-and-so, impartial judges, who were chosen upon the spot, should pronounce that Mozart was a composer not inferior to Mayer and Paër, erring, like them, through an overweening fondness for German noise and racket, but, upon the whole, much upon a par with the authors of "*Sargine*" and "*Cora.*" The other party was ready to burst with laughter; they knew that their good friend was not very bright, but this wager was the dullest of the dull things he had ever been guilty of. The nobleman, who prided himself

not a little upon the clever scheme he had planned, retarded the grand day of trial under various pretexts, in order to gain time, and come more fully prepared into the field. At length the important day arrived. The concert took place at his country-house, the music went off to admiration, and he gained his wager without a dissenting voice. This brilliant exploit served him as a topic of conversation for years afterwards, and he gained the credit of being less a fool by half than he was formerly.

This event made considerable stir; Mozart was in every one's mouth, his music was eagerly enquired after, and at last his operas were brought forward. "*Don Giovanni*" was given in Rome, about 1811; the parts were not sung amiss, but the orchestra was sadly puzzled with this new and difficult music. The time was any thing but correct; the instruments ran along one after the other, in a manner very amusing to any one but a good musician; it was like a symphony of Haydn played by a party of amateurs, from which, heaven deliver us! In fine, in 1814, "*Don Giovanni*" was given at the *Scala*, and the success it obtained was incredible. In 1816, the "*Flauto Magico*" was also attempted, but it fell, and in its fall drew down ruin upon the poor Chevalier Petracchi; however, "*Don Giovanni*" was resumed, and received with an enthusiasm little short of ex-

travagance, if indeed extravagance it can be called, when Mozart is in question.

At present, Mozart is tolerably well understood in Italy, but he is far from being felt as he ought to be.*

* In music, we never think of recalling any thing to our recollection which we cannot repeat; now, when we return from an opera and shut ourselves up alone, we cannot repeat harmony with a single voice.

Upon this appears to me to be founded the essential difference between the German and Italian music. A young Italian in love, never begins to brood over his passion in moments when he is solitary, moments when the influence of that passion is most deeply felt, without beginning to hum over one of the airs of Rossini; and without giving it a thought, he is sure to chuse among the many he knows, that particular one which is most adapted to the state of his feelings at that particular moment. Presently, instead of humming it over, he sings it aloud, and gives it the peculiar expression of that shade of passion which is then in his mind. This echo of his feelings consoles him; the song is, if I may so express it, a mirror in which he beholds himself. When the young Italian awakens from his reverie, he begins to reflect upon the new shade of feeling which he has given to this air; he is delighted at the discovery, and piques himself upon it as something like an invention of his own. From this state of his feelings, to the composition of a new air, the transition is easy; and as custom, as well as climate, has gifted the inhabitants of Italy with a voice full of expression, they feel no want of a piano to arrange their ideas. Such is the origin of those sublime and plaintive airs, which, from age to age, are repeated in Naples and its neighbourhood. Among a hundred others, I might quote the national airs, called "*la Cavajola*," and "*il Pestagallo*." An in-

According to the general opinion, the principal effect of his works has been to place in the second rank, Mayer, Weigl, Winter, and the rest of the German faction.

In this view of the subject he may be said to have smoothed the way for Rossini, the zenith of whose reputation may be fixed about the year 1815, and who, on his appearance on the musical horizon, found no other rivals of his splendour than Pavesi, Mosca, Guglielmi, Generali, Portagallo, Nicolini, and certain other imitators of the style of Cimarosa and Paisiello. These gentlemen played about the same part, as did

habitant of Aquila, after singing them to me, exclaimed, "*Questa musica è il lamento dell'amore, o la preghiera degli Dei!** I have known twenty young men at Naples who could compose an air with as little effort, as another person would write a letter. Frequently they will return home in the evening, seat themselves at their piano, and pass the greater part of the night, so delicious in this climate, in singing and composing extempore. Nothing farther from their thoughts than authorship and petty fame; they give language to the passion by which they are animated, and this makes them happy: here you have the whole secret. In England, a young man, under similar circumstances, would have pored, from one to two o'clock, over some favourite author; but, unlike the young Neapolitan, he would not have created any thing; his soul would have been less active, and consequently he would have enjoyed less real pleasure.

* This music is the lament of love, or the prayer of the Gods.

with us the last copyists of the style and manner of Racine. They were sure of being applauded at the time, and cried up to the skies; but, strange to say, their admirers always found a certain portion of *ennui* at bottom; and, at rising up from the entertainment, were half inclined to be angry with themselves for the praises they had bestowed. No one, at the time, had the courage to say that it was dull; on the contrary, every body, half yawning, endeavoured to convince his neighbour that it was all very charming.

After a resistance of above ten years, the Italians have ceased to be hypocrites in speaking of Mozart. But he will never obtain the success among them which he enjoys in Germany and England. The reason is evident: his music is not *calculated for the climate.* Its distinguishing characteristic is that of touching the deeper feelings of the soul, by awakening melancholy images, by bidding us dwell upon the sorrows of the most tender, though frequently the most unhappy, of the passions. Love is not the same at Naples and at Königsberg; in Italy it is more vivid, more impatient, more impetuous, nourishing itself less upon the imagination. It does not make itself master of the faculties of the soul by little and little, and for ever; it takes it by assault, and carries it entirely, and in an instant: it is a furor, but furor is not

melancholy: it is the impulse of all the powers of the soul, and melancholy is the absence of them. Italian love has not been painted, that I know of, in any native romance. This nation has no romances, but it has Cimarosa, who, in the language of his country, has painted love in a superior manner, and with all its shades of feeling, from that of the tender *Carolina*, in the "*Ah! tu sai ch' io vivo in pene*," to that of the dotard, in "*Io venia per sposarti.*"

But let us return to Mozart, and to his airs, so full of *violence*, as the Italians term it. He appeared on the Italian horizon at the same time with Rossini, about the year 1812; but I have my doubts whether he will not be still spoken of, when the star of Rossini shall "'gin to pale his ineffectual fires." Mozart is an inventor in all points, and in every sense of the word; he resembles no other composer, while Rossini resembles many.

The science of harmony may make whatever progress it pleases, still it will be seen, with astonishment, that all that can be done has already been anticipated by Mozart. Hence, as to what regards the mechanical branch of his art, he can never be surpassed: to attempt it, would be folly;—it would be like the painter who should undertake to surpass Titian in strength and truth of colouring, or the poet, Racine, in beauty of versification and delicacy of sentiment.

In a moral point of view, there is no comparison between Rossini and Mozart. The latter, "in the very tempest and whirlwind of his passion," is sure to hurry the soul away with irresistless force. Then, he is the very musician of melancholy: so strong, so distinct, so real, is the imagery in which he presents it to the soul, that minds possessed of the least enthusiasm are sure to be moved. Rossini is always amusing; Mozart never. The music of the latter is like a grave and pensive mistress, who steals away the heart more effectually on account of this very pensiveness: a woman of this character either fails at once of her effect, and is set down for a prude, or makes a profound impression, that seizes upon the soul at once and for ever.

In Italy, as every where else, there is a certain class of amateurs, who never venture to utter an opinion of their own, but are content to be the echos of the voice of fashion or caprice; they never speak from themselves, but always modestly and respectfully repeat the sentiments of others. These good people have been amused by Rossini, —they have applauded, with transport, his "*Pietra del Paragone*," and the "*Italiana in Algeri;*" they have been touched by the duet in "*Bianca e Faliero;*" they say that Rossini has imparted new life to the *opera seria;* but, in their hearts, they regard him as a brilliant heresiarch. They consider him in the same light as Pietro di Cortona, a painter of great effect, who

dazzled Italy for some time by the brilliancy of his colouring, so that, after looking at one of his pictures, Raphael himself seemed tame. Raphael has many of the softer qualities, and the modest perfections, that characterise Mozart. Nothing makes less pretensions, in the whole range of painting, than the modest air and celestial purity of one of the Madonnas of the painter of Urbino, with her eyes fixed in downcast tenderness upon the smiling *bambino* (child). If the picture were not *called* a Raphael, the crowd of vulgar amateurs would coldly pass it by, without deigning to cast a look upon a thing so simple, and which, to *common* souls, is a thing so *common*.

It is precisely the same with the duet, "*La ci darem la mano*." If this air were not *known* to be by Mozart, the greater part of our musical *dandies* would call it dull and heavy in the extreme: on the contrary, they are electrified by *Rossini*'s air in the "*Barbiere*,"—"*Io sono docile*." What matters it that this air, by being misplaced, is contradictory to common sense? What have they to do with common sense?

The great difference between the music of Mozart and that of Rossini is, that they are scarcely ever addressed to the same persons. Mozart may apply to his brilliant rival (if rival he can be called,) the words of the niece to her aunt, in Dumoustier's comedy of "*Les Femmes*,'

"Va,
"Tu ne plairas jamais à qui j'aurai su plaire."

The people of taste, of whom I spoke above, declare that, if Rossini has not the same comic vein, and the same richness of ideas, as Cimarosa, at least, he has the advantage of the Neapolitan in vivacity and rapidity of style. They find him for ever *syncoping* those phrases which Cimarosa always takes care to develop, even to their last consequences. If Rossini never composed an air so comic as "*Amicone del mio core*," Cimarosa never wrote an air so rapid as the duet in the "*Barbiere*,"—"*Oggi arriva un regimento*," or that of *Rosina* and *Figaro*, in the same opera. Now, Mozart has nothing of all this,—nothing light, nothing rapid, nothing comic; he is the very opposite, not only to Rossini, but almost to Cimarosa himself. Would he have composed that air of the "*Orazj*,"—"*Quelle pupille tenere*," without throwing into it a deep shade of melancholy? The more we are charmed with the music of Rossini and Cimarosa, and the more we become familiarised to it, the more we are disposed to enjoy the music of Mozart,—the more we are *saturated* with the gay measures and little notes of Rossini,—the greater the pleasure with which we shall return to the large notes and slow movements of the author of the "*Così fan tutte*."

Mozart, I believe, was never gay more than two or three times in his life; much about the same number of times that Rossini has been melancholy. The latter has composed an opera in

which a young soldier sees the mistress of his heart condemned to death under his own eyes, and led away to punishment; and yet there is nothing sombre in the "*Gazza Ladra.*" In the sad story of "*Otello,*" there is nothing melancholy but the duet of *Desdemona* and her attendant, the prayer, and the romance. But then I might cite the quartetto in "*Bianca e Faliero,*" the duet of "*Armida,*" and even the splendid instrumental movement, at the moment that *Renaud*, agitated by a thousand passions, retires from the scene, and returns again: all these are perfectly expressive of Italian love,—of a passion that is sombre and impetuous, but which has no melancholy in it. In a word, there is scarcely any thing in common between the chefs-d'œuvres of Rossini,—"*La Pietra del Paragone,*" "*L'Italiana in Algeri,*" "*Tancredi,*" "*Otello,*"—and the operas of Mozart. The resemblance, (if resemblance there be, and which at best goes no further than the style,) took place at a later period. It was only in the "*Gazza Ladra,*" and the "*Mosè,*" that Rossini first began to imitate the *strong* manner of the German school.

Rossini has never written any thing so full of feeling as the duet, "*Crudel perche finora,*" of Mozart; nor any thing so truly comic as "*Mentr'io ero un mascalzone,*" or the duet in the "*Nemici generosi,*" of Cimarosa. But neither Mozart nor Cimarosa has ever composed any thing so light and animated as the duet, "*D'un*

bel uso di Turchia, in the "*Turco in Italia*," which, it appears to me, is the method that should be pursued, in order to form a just estimate of the different style and character of these three great masters, who, followed by a crowd of imitators, occupy at present the musical scene of Europe.

MEMOIRS

OF

ROSSINI.

CHAPTER I.

Rossini's family—Born at Pesaro, 1792—*Studies music under Angelo Tesei—Goes on his musical tour—Composes a Cantata, in* 1808, *and the Operas of* "Demetrio e Polibio," *in* 1809; "La Cambiale di matrimonio," 1810; L'Equivoco Stravagante," *in* 1811; "L'Inganno Felice," *in* 1812; "Ciro in Babalonia," *an Oratorio;* "La Scala di Seta;" "L'Occasione fa il Ladro;" "Il Figlio per Azzardo," *all in the same year, and* "Tancredi," *in* 1813—*Rossini accepts an engagement at Venice.*

GIOACCHINO ROSSINI was born on the 29th of February, 1792, at Pesaro, a pretty little town in the Papal states, situated on the gulf of Venice. His father was an inferior performer on the French horn, of the third class, in one of those strolling companies of musicians, who, to gain a livelihood, attend

the fairs of Sinigaglia, Fermo, Forli, and other small towns of Romagna, or its vicinity. The little musical resources, in which the company is deficient, are collected in the neighbourhood where they pitch their tent; an orchestra is collected impromptu, and the good folks of the fair are treated with an opera. His mother, who passed for one of the prettiest women of Romagna, was a *seconda donna* of very passable talents. They went from town to town, and from company to company; the husband playing in the orchestra, and his wife singing on the stage. Poverty was of course the companion of their wanderings; and their son Rossini, covered with glory, and with a name that resounded from one end of Europe to the other, faithful to his paternal poverty, had not, before his arrival two years ago at Vienna, for his whole capital, a sum equal to the annual pay of an actress on the stage of Paris or Lisbon. Living is cheap at Pesaro; and, although this family subsisted on the most precarious means in the world, they never lost their natural gaiety, and strictly adhered to the maxim of taking no heed for the future.

The political state of that part of Italy in which Rossini was born, is but little to

be envied. All the Papal government requires from its subjects is the regular payment of taxes, and a strict attendance on mass. Its subjects, on the other hand, require from the Papal government free will in every thing else; and, on the strength of this compact, all the tastes, propensities, and passions of man flourish and luxuriate in a fearless vigour, that would astonish the governments of France and England. Man may do what he will, or be what he will, in that land of sensibility. This, it is true, fills the roads with banditti; but it crowds the convents with monks: it fills her palaces with impurity; but it never leaves the *Cassinos* destitute of beauty: it fills the streets with mendicants; but it sends hosts of amateurs upon the stage.

Music has irresistible charms for the Italian; a guitar and a voice will carry him from Tarento to Domo d'Ossola,—through Italy, and through life. Italy has been happily termed—the land of love and of the *dolce far niente*.* Sunshine costs nothing; and no man can contrive so well to dispense

* Sweet nothing-to-do*ishness*.

with clothes as the Italian. He can be luxurious, when luxury is before him; he can fast when he has nothing else to do. No living being can exist upon so little as he; he can live upon an onion, water, air. He "diets of the cameleon's dish," and, nestling by the side of his mule on the Appennine, or on a litter of straw in the valleys of Piedmont, he dreams of the pence and plaudits of the Boulevards, or the golden showers of the Haymarket.

Rossini's portion from his father, was the true native heirship of an Italian: a little music, a little religion, and a volume of Ariosto. The rest of his education was consigned to the legitimate school of southern youth, the society of his mother, the young singing girls of the company, those *prima donnas* in embryo, and the gossips of every village through which they passed. This was aided and refined by the musical barber and news-loving coffee-house keeper of the Papal village.

In 1799, the parents of Rossini took him from Pesaro to Bologna, but he did not begin to study music till 1812, when he was twelve years of age. His first master was

D. Angelo Tesei. In the course of a few months, the young *Gioacchino* already earned some *paoli* by singing in the churches. His pleasing soprano voice, and the vivacity of his youthful manners, gained him many friends among the priests who directed the *Funzioni.* Under Professor Angelo Tesei, *Gioacchino* became a tolerable proficient in singing, in the art of accompanying, and in the rules of counterpoint. In 1806, he was capable of singing at first sight any piece of music put before him, and great hopes were conceived of his future excellence; it was augured from his growth and the quality of his voice, that he would make an excellent tenor.

On the 27th of August, 1806, he quitted Bologna to make the musical tour of Romagna. He took his place at the piano, as director of the orchestra at Lugo, Ferrara, Forli, Sinigaglia, and other little towns. It was only in 1807, that the young Rossini gave up singin gin the church. The 20th of March, in the same year, he entered the Lyceum of Bologna, and received lessons in music from Padre *Stanislao Mattei.*

A year after, (the 11th of August, 1808,) he had made so considerable a progress, as to

be qualified to compose a symphony, and a cantata, entitled "*Il Pianto d'Armonia.*" This was his first essay in vocal music. Immediately after this, he was chosen director of the Academy of the *Concordi*, a musical society at that time existing in the bosom of the Lyceum at Bologna.

"*Demetrio et Polibio*" is the first opera composed by Rossini. It is said to have been written in 1809, but it was not performed till 1812, in the theatre *Valle*, at Rome. Some have imagined that it was re-written by the master for this representation; but there is no proof of the fact. Rossini's known indolence, and the active duties he was obliged to perform this year, would rather tell against such a supposition.

Such was the progress Rossini had made at nineteen, that he was chosen to direct, as head of the orchestra, the "*Four Seasons*" of Haydn, which were executed at Bologna; the "*Creation*," which was given on the same occasion, (May 1811), was directed by the celebrated Soprano *Marchesi*. When the parents of Rossini had no engagement, they returned to their residence at Pesaro. Some rich amateurs of this town, I believe of the

family *Perticari*, took the young Rossini under their protection. A young lady, of considerable beauty and fortune, formed the happy idea of sending him to Venice; he there composed, for the theatre *San-Mosè*, a little opera in one act, entitled "*La Cambiale di Matrimonio*" (1810). This was the first opera of Rossini performed upon the stage. After a success very flattering to a beginner, he returned to Bologna; and, in the autumn of the following year (1811), produced "*L'Equivoco Stravagante*." The following year he returned to Venice, and composed for the carnival, "*L'Inganno Felice*."

In this piece genius shines forth in every part. An experienced eye will at once recognize in this opera, in one act, the parent ideas of fifteen or twenty capital pieces, which at a latter period contributed to decide the fortune of the *chefs-d'œuvres* of Rossini. It contains a beautiful *terzetto*, between the peasant *Tarabetto*, the lord of the domain, and the wife, who has been exiled by her deluded husband.

The "*Inganno felice*" resembles the first pictures of Raphael, which he painted in the school of Perrugino, and which display

all the faults and all the timidity of early youth. Rossini, not venturing to assume the master at twenty, was fearful as yet to attempt to please himself only. The great artist is composed of two elements : of a soul tender, impassioned, fastidious, and demanding much ; and of a talent that makes every effort to please this soul, and to delight it by the creation of new beauties.

The same year, the patrons of Rossini procured him an engagement at Ferrara ; and, during the last season, he composed an oratorio, intitled "*Ciro in Babilonia*," a work containing many beauties, but considered by critics as inferior in energy to the "*Inganno felice*." After this Rossini was again summoned to Venice ; but the *Impressario* (director) of *San-Moscè*, not content with gaining, for a few *sequini*, the talents of a pleasing composer, who was patronized by the ladies, and whose rising genius was destined to bring new honours to his theatre, thought that, as he was poor, he might treat him cavalierly with impunity. Rossini at once gave a proof of that originality of character, by which he has been always distinguished.

In quality of composer, Rossini's power over the orchestra was absolute, and he could oblige them to execute whatever he composed. In the new opera, therefore, of "*La Scala di Seta,*" which he made for the insolent *impressario,* he brought together an assemblage of all the extravagances and whimsical combinations, in which, it may well be supposed, a head like his is sufficiently fertile. For instance, in the *allegro* of the overture, the violins were made to break off at the end of every bar, in order to give a rap with the bow, upon the tin shades of the candlesticks. It would be difficult to imagine the astonishment and indignation of an immense concourse of people, assembled from every quarter of Venice, and even from the *Terra Firma,* to hear the new Opera of the young *Maestro.* This public, who, during the greater part of the afternoon, had besieged the doors; who had been forced to wait whole hours in the passages, and at last to endure the "tug of war" at the opening of the doors, thought themselves personally insulted, and hissed with all the vengeance of an enraged Italian public. Rossini, not in the least

moved by all this uproar, coolly asked the trembling *impressario*, with a smile, what he had gained by treating him so cavalierly. He then quitted the theatre, and started at once for Milan, where his friends had procured him an engagement. However, a month after, he made his peace with the humbled manager; and, returning to Venice, successively produced two *farze* (operas in one act,) at the theatre *San-Mosè*, "*L'Occasione fa il Ladro*" (1812), and "*Il Figlio per azzardo*," (in the Carnival of 1813.) It was also during this Carnival, that Rossini composed his "*Tancrèdi.*"

No adequate idea can be formed of the success which this delightful Opera obtained at Venice,—the city which, of all others, is considered as most critical in its judgments, and whose opinions, as to the merits of a composition, are supposed to hold the greatest weight. Suffice it to say, that the presence of Napoleon himself, who honoured the Venetians with a visit, was unable to call off their attention from Rossini. All was enthusiasm! *tutto furore*, to use the terms of that expressive language, which seems to have been created

for the use of the arts. From the gondolier to the patrician, every body was repeating

"Mi rivedrai, ti revedrò."

In the very courts of law, the judges were obliged to impose silence on the auditory, who were ceaselessly humming

"Ti revedrò."

Of this we have been credibly informed by many persons who were witnesses of the singular fact.

"Our Cimarosa is returned to life again,"* was the expression when two *dilettanti* met in the streets. Nay, it was even something better; he inspired fresh delight, he produced new effects. Before Rossini came, there had always been a considerable portion of languor and tediousness in the *opera seria*; the choice pieces were sparingly sown; they were frequently found separated from each other, by fifteen or twenty minutes of recitation and *ennui*. Rossini, by his life, his fire, his vivacity,

* Cimarosa, adored at Venice, and the intimate friend of the greater part of the amateurs of music, died there a few years before, in 1801.

had carried the *opera buffa* to its utmost degree of perfection.

It cannot be denied, that the true *opera buffa*,—the *libretti* for which were composed, in the Neapolitan dialect, by *Tita di Lorenzi*, —had been carried to the very acme of perfection, by Paisiello, Cimarosa, and Fioravanti. It would be folly to require more fire, genius, and life, than what animate their compositions: there is no work of art in which nearer approaches have been made to the finished and the perfect. The success of Rossini has arisen, in a great measure, from the art with which he has known how to transfer a portion of the spirit and fire of the *opera buffa*, to that of the *mezzo caratere*, as in the "*Barbiere di Seviglia*," the "*Tancredi*," &c.

The real *opera buffa* is almost unknown beyond the limits of Naples; great as is the progress that instrumental music has made, since the days of Fioravanti and Paisiello, it would be found difficult to add one more note, either of the oboë or bassoon, to their *chefs-d'œuvre*, without injuring the general effect: Rossini, therefore, has shewn his judgment, in not

treading on this ground; he has been content with the more feasible task of throwing life and energy into the *opera seria*.

CHAP. II.

Rossini at Venice—"Il Tancredi"—*Anecdote relative to the air* "Di tanti palpiti"—*Rossini and the Prima Donna.*

The delightful Opera of "Tancredi" made the tour of Europe, in the short space of four years. It holds so high a place among the efforts of Rossini's genius, as to demand a particular notice. The first bars of the overture are not deficient of a certain grace and nobleness, but it is not till the *allegro* movement, that the talent of the composer begins fully to display itself. It possesses a character of novelty, and a daring attempt at originality, that, on the first night of its representation at Venice, captivated every heart. This was a fortunate omen for the composer. The national honour

of the Venetians was still alive to the insult that had been offered them by the *obligato* accompaniment of the tin-candlesticks. Rossini was conscious of this, and would not venture to take his place at the piano, according to custom, and to the terms of his engagement. He anticipated the storm that awaited him, and had concealed himself under the stage, in the passage leading to the orchestra. After waiting for him in vain, the first violin, finding the moment of performance draw nigh, and that the public began to manifest signs of impatience, determined to commence the Opera.

This first *allegro* pleased so much, that during the applauses and repeated bravos, Rossini crept from his hiding-place, and slipped into his seat at the piano.

The overture finished, the curtain rises, and we see a chorus of Syracusian knights, who sing, "*Paci onore . . . fede, amore.*" This chorus is very pleasing, but is this the character suited to such a situation? Is it not defective in that force, which is so conspicuous in every part of the works of Haydn? The consequence is, that in spite of its agreeable character, this *Intro-*

*duzione** produces but little effect. If the idea of correcting, and especially of correcting any thing that pleases him, were not the farthest thing in the world from the character of Rossini, he would have devoted some minutes to this chorus of Syracusian knights.

The cavatina of Ameniade, "*Come dolce all' alma mia*," wants the melancholy that Mozart would have thrown into it, and some of the ornaments are too pretty not to be out of their place. A maiden of a somewhat exalted soul, musing upon her absent lover, and that lover proscribed and banished, ought surely to speak the language of sadness. Rossini was perhaps too young to feel the force of this truth, or he was fearful, in attempting melancholy music, to become tedious. At a more advanced age he would have imitated Mozart; at eighteen he wrote what his genius dictated, and that genius, if possessed of any tenderness at all, seems defective in that kind, at least, which is accompanied by melancholy.

* The term *Introduzione* is applied to every thing that is sung from the close of the overture to the beginning of the first recitative.

At length we came to the celebrated *entrata* of Tancred. A theatre like some of those in Italy is necessary, in order that the landing of the knight and his suite on a lone and solitary spot should produce a certain nobleness of effect. On a stage of the dimensions of our own, where Tancred has to step from his ricketty bark within some dozen paces of the audience, it cannot but have an air of the ridiculous. At Milan, the illusion of distance, and of admirably managed machinery, produces an entirely different effect on the imagination. The history of this *scena* is curious; Rossini, in the first instance, had composed a grand air for the entrance of Tancred; but it did not please the Signora Malanote, and she refused to sing it. What was still more mortifying, she did not make known this unwillingness till the very evening before the first representation of the piece. Malanote was a first-rate singer, she was in the flower of youth and beauty, and the gallantry of the young composer was obliged to give way to this no-unusual sally of caprice. At first his despair was extreme: "If after the occurrence in my last opera, " exclaimed Rossini,"

"the first entrance of Tancred should be hissed — *tutta l'Opera va a terra.*" The poor young man returned pensive to his lodgings. An idea came into his head; he seizes his pen and scribbles down some few lines; it is the famous "*Tu che accendi,*" —that which, of all airs in the world, has perhaps been sung the oftenest, and in the greatest number of places. The story goes, at Venice, that the first idea of this delicious *cantilena*, so expressive of the joy of revisiting one's native shore after long years of absence, is taken from a Greek litany, which Rossini had heard, some days previous, chaunted at vespers, in a church on one of the islets of the Laguna near Venice.

At Venice it is called the *aria dei rizi* (air of rice); the reason is this: in Lombardy, every dinner, from that of the *gran signore* to that of the *piccolo maestro*, invariably begins with a plate of rice; and, as they do not like their rice over done, it is an indispensable rule for the cook to come a few minutes before dinner is served up, with the important question,—*bisogna mettere i rizi?* (shall the rice be put down?) At the moment Rossini came home in a state of des-

peration, his servant put the usual question to him; the rice was put on the fire, and, before it was ready, Rossini had furnished his celebrated "*Di tanti palpiti.*"

On the arrival of *Tancred* we have an example in the orchestra of the truly sublime of dramatic harmony. This does not consist, as the Germans maintain, in the art of expressing the sentiments of the personage on the scene, by means of clarinets, violoncellos, and oboës; it consists in the rarer art of making the instruments express those sentiments which the personage himself is unable, for some cause or other, to utter. On arriving at this desert spot, *Tancred* paints in a single word what is passing in his soul. After this a moment of silence is necessary, to allow him to contemplate that ungrateful land, which he beholds again with mingled emotions of pleasure and pain. Were the hero to continue talking on without interruption, he would destroy a considerable part of the interest we feel for him, and would contradict the idea we naturally form of his deep emotions on revisiting the spot which is inhabited by *Amenäide*. *Tancred* ought to brood over his sorrows for some

moments in silence; but, in the mean time, the sighs of the horn paint the emotions of his soul, and perhaps certain shades of feelings, to which language could very inadequately give utterance.

This is what music was not made to accomplish in the days of Pergolese and Sacchini, and which is still neglected or disregarded by composers of the German school. They make the instruments speak out every thing roundly, not only what they ought to tell us, but also what the personage himself ought to utter in his song. Instruments, like the varieties of the human voice, have their distinct characters: thus, for instance, during the air and recitative of *Tancred*, Rossini has employed the flute, and nothing could have been more judicious; this instrument has the peculiar power of painting the mingled emotions of grief and joy, and such are the feelings that swell the heart of *Tancred*, on beholding that ungrateful country which he is condemned to visit only in disguise.

If we were to consider harmony under another point of view, in as far as regards its relation to song, it might be remarked that

Rossini has employed the same art that distinguishes the writings of Sir Walter Scott, and which, if we mistake not, has ensured such extraordinary success to the author of "*Old Mortality*." As this author prepares and sustains his dialogues and recitals by highly coloured descriptions, so does Rossini his song by high-wrought harmonies. In illustration of my idea, see the opening scene in "*Marmion*," and in particular the first pages of "*Ivanhoe*," which present us with that admirable description of the setting sun, darting its last horizontal rays through the low and tufted branches of the trees that conceal the habitation of Cedric the Saxon. The pale rays fall upon the singular attire of the fool Wamba, and Gurth the swine-herd. Little as these two personages seem suited to the heroic, yet, by being thus connected with this opening description, we feel a certain degree of interest in them and are anxious to know what they have to impart; and when at last they do speak, their least words possess a more than common interest. Suppose the romance to have opened with this dialogue, unprepared by any description, and it would be found to have lost nearly the whole of its effect.

It is thus that men of genius employ harmony in music, in the very manner that Sir W. Scott has done description in these instances; others, not excepting the learned M. Cherubini, heap up their harmonies one upon the other, in the same manner as Delille has done his descriptions, in his poem "*Là Pitié.*" How different from this Sir W. Scott, who by a happy interchange of dialogue and description, gives a keener relish for each. Such descriptions, when judiciously employed, have a wonderful efficacy in soothing the soul, and in giving it that tone, which allows the simplest dialogue to produce its full effect, and the same observations may equally apply to harmony when employed with taste and judgment. In the days of Pergolese, such descriptions were unknown; Mozart was the Walter Scott of music. He employed description in the most effective and enchanting manner; sometimes, though rarely, he carried it to excess. Mayer, Winter, and Weigl, like the Abbe Dellile, are lavish of their descriptions: learned it must be allowed, correct in grammar and in the mechanical part of art, but cold and uninteresting. Rossini has em-

ployed them in a manner that has universally pleased; his colouring is lively, and his lights singularly picturesque; he always attracts the eye, but he sometimes fatigues it. In his "*Gazza Ladra*," for instance, we would fain a hundred times silence the orchestra, in order to be gratified by more song. Rossini had not given into these faults, when he wrote his "*Tancredi*;" he then preserved the happy mean between abundance and profusion; he knew how to adorn beauty, without concealing it, without taking from its effect, without overloading it with vain ornaments. Its songs are, if I may be allowed the expression, garnished with singular, new, and unexpected accompaniments, which always enliven the ear, and give a poignant effect to things in appearance the most common; and yet, while these accompaniments produce such powerful effects, they never interfere with the ease and freedom of the voice; or, to use the more happy expression of a celebrated critic,* "*Fanno coll canto conversazione rispetosa:*"

* M. Buratti, the author of "*L'Homo*," and "*L'Elefanteide*,"—two delightful satires.

they never exceed the bounds of a respectful conversation in regard to song; they take care to be silent when the song appears to have something to say: in the German music, on the contrary, the accompaniments are, frequently, loud and insolent.

"There are faults in the first finale of '*Tancredi*,' said a critic one evening at Brescia; "there are leaps from one note to another, that astonish the ear."—The reply was: "And is it absolutely necessary that the ear should never be astonished? If you wish to make discoveries at sea, you must encounter dangers and dash into unknown latitudes. If it were never permitted to astonish the ear, would the wild and singular Beethoven have succeeded after the noble and judicious Haydn?"

The duet "*Ah! se de' mali miei*," which commences by the profound melancholy of the hero, and finishes by a burst of triumphant courage, is of a very striking character. During the last movement, the trumpets are employed with an address worthy of the most consummate master. Rossini at eighteen divined by instinct what others can with difficulty comprehend after a whole

life spent in long and laborious study. The movement "*Il vivo lampo,*" at the moment *Tancred* draws his sword, is considered as one of the happiest things Rossini ever composed. And here I would give a hint to singers to be sparing of their roulades in these bursts of violent passion; as in this sentiment of *Tancred,* "*Odiarla, oh ciel! non so.*" What more inconsistent than that a person in the transports of passion, should be studious of elegance, or, in other words, should have the cool leisure to consider what others may think of him. The man under the influence of violent emotions can only be supposed to preserve that degree of involuntary elegance which, with him, has become a habit. Such roulades, on the contrary, may be well displayed on such words as "*Di quella spada,*" for the very reverse of the reasons just stated.

It is impossible to quit the subject without saying one word of the chorus of knights when in search of *Tancred,*—"*Regna il terror.*"* It is a model of the beautiful in

* We regret to be obliged to remark that, from the very imperfect manner in which the choruses are performed at the King's Theatre, no adequate idea

its kind. It is the perfection of the union of the melody of the Italian, with the harmony of the German, school. Thus far, and no farther, should the revolution be allowed to proceed, which is hurrying us back into complicated harmony.

How much good may arise from a simple cause! The offence given to the Venetian public by an accompaniment of tin-candlesticks, proved the means of awakening all Rossini's energies, to efface this unfavourable impression by an effort of art. He was therefore careful to avoid those common places of melody and harmony that abound in the scores of the greater part of his rivals. Scarcely a single instance will be found of those hacknied phrases of harmony, which form the *corps de reserve* of the German composers; and which, of late years, Rossini has but too lavishly employed in such of his operas as are cast in the German mould, for instance—*Il Mosè, Otello, La Gazza Ladra, Ermione, &c.*

can be formed of the beauty of the charming chorus here spoken of. The manager of this establishment would surely consult his interest by attending to this important defect, which is sometimes so glaring as to be absolutely offensive.

It may well be supposed, that in such a place as Venice, Rossini was not less happy as a man, than celebrated as a composer. The fame of his reputation, aided by the agreeableness of his manners, won him the heart of the charming *cantatrice buffa,* the *Signo ra Marcolini,* then in the flower of her beauty, and her talents. Her charms were all-powerful, and she succeeded in estranging his affections from his former fair patrons. The world declared he was a most ungrateful man; and the chronicles of those days report that abundant were the reproaches uttered, and the tears shed, on this heart-rending occasion. Many anecdotes are afloat respecting this subject, singularly illustrative of the gaiety, recklessness, and inconstancy of Rossini's character. As a proof of Marcolini's devotedness, it has been confidently asserted that, in order to gain this son of renown—this vanquisher of hearts, she actually sacrificed the illustrious author of the Epic of Charlemagne.

It was for *Marcolini,*—it was for her delicious *contr'alto* voice, and admirable comic powers, that he composed the gay and animated part of the *Italiana in Algeri,* which

we saw so sadly disfigured in a northern capital. We spare the name of the actress, in consideration of her being a pretty woman; but we must declare that she betrayed the character committed to her hands. And may not her prudery have been carried too far? Is there any thing so very alarming in the character of a young woman of the South,—gay, giddy, and full of the passions of her clime? Well; be it so! only let us beware, in our fear of giving offence to the gravity of the age, not to incur the charge of affectation or hypocrisy.

CHAP. III.

Rossini at Venice, continued—L'Italiana in Algeri—*Political allusions—Anecdote of Rossini's Indolence.*

In speaking of the "*Italiana*," we shall, of course, be understood as referring not to that opera, which appeared among us divested of half its spirit, but to that which really came from the pen of Rossini, and

such as it was performed in Italy, where it at once placed the youthful composer in the first rank of *maestri*.

The reflected tints of the rainbow are not more delicate and more evanescent than the effects of music, inasmuch as all the charm depends upon the imagination. An association of disagreeable ideas, though involuntary, may tend to destroy for ever the effect of a masterpiece. Such was the case with us, with respect to the "*Italiana:*" the impression produced by its mediocre performance will not easily be effaced; indeed, had it not been for the spirit, vivacity, and admirable acting, of Ambrogetti, it would, in all probability, have been a complete failure. This having been the case, all those who should go and witness its revival, would go with an idea of seeing something mediocre. Such a prejudice would almost prove fatal to the finest music in the world.

The overture of the "*Italiana*" is delicious, but perhaps gay even to a fault. The introduction is admirable; the air, "*Ah! lo sposo or più non m'ama,*" is highly expressive of the grief of an innocent

woman who has been deserted; it is full of profound feeling, without digressing into the tragic.

The cavatina of Lindor, "*Languir per una bella,*" has a freshness about it that is delightful. The effect is in the highest degree imposing, though the music is simple: upon the whole, it is considered one of the prettiest things Rossini ever composed for a tenor voice.

The duet between Lindor and Mustapha, "*Se inclinesse prender moglie,*" is scarcely less agreeable than the former, but it has a deeper shade of the dramatic and the serious. It has been objected to the music of Rossini, that it has too much levity, and too little passion. It might be answered that, in the true *opera buffa*, the bursts of passion must be rare; and as if introduced to form an occasional relief to the general gaiety. It is thus, that the effect of a trait of tenderness comes with irresistible force upon the heart, from the effect of contrast, and perhaps from its being unexpected.

In the second part of this duet, "*Caro amico, non c'è scampo,*" Rossini has given

one of the first examples of his greatest musical defect. The song of *Mustapha* is that of a clarinet; it consists entirely of *batterics*, whose only purpose is to set off to more advantage the delicious cantilena entrusted to the tenor. Cimarosa would not have acted thus. He had the happy art of giving such interest to these second parts that, if the ear should happen to be diverted from the first, it might find a due degree of pleasure in the second. Were this the case in the present instance, the part executed by *Mustapha*, would be found meagre, insignificant, and unnatural.

The air of Isabella, "*Cruda sorte, amor tiranno,*" is weak and without genius. But, to make good this defect, we are presented immediately after with the famous duet, "*Ai capricci della sorte:*" this contains an ease, grace, and elegance, of which few examples are to be found, even in Cimarosa himself.

The cantilena, "*Maltrattata dalla sorte,*" is a *chef-d'œuvre* of coquetry; it may be said to be the first instance where this trait of character has been represented in Italy

in its true colours. Cimarosa is too apt to put the accents of real love into the mouths of his coquets. It may be said that, in describing the heart of woman, perhaps, this is the only fault with which this great man can be reproached. It was necessary that the present air of *Isabella*, should possess sufficient love to deceive the dupe, together with sufficient sprightliness to amuse the public.

The finale of the first act has been severely criticised; but the criticism has, in general, been rather directed towards the words than the music.

It is true that the Bey declares:

"Come scoppio di cannone
La mia testa fa bumbù!"

and that *Taddeo* exclaims:

"Sono come una cornacchia
Che spennata fa crà, crà!"*

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* Like the bursting of a cannon
How my poor head goes bom-bo!

I am like a poor pluck'd rook,
That, stript of feathers, cries cra, cra!

And yet this simplicity has found its admirers and imitators amongst ourselves. See the *Christabelle* of

—and that in place of this we might have had eight or ten delicious verses of Marmontel or M. Etienne; but we might also have had them accompanied by the music of a Dalayrac or a Moudonville; and surely that would not have mended the matter. To suffer our minds to be called off from the gay and enlivening music of Rossini, to attend to some absurdity in the words of the *libretto,* is like looking to see if Teniers has painted his humorous sketch upon the best kind of canvass, of eighteen-pence the yard.

Apropos, as to the *libretto;* in general these things are so dull and so vapid, that I would advise the amateur merely to attend to the situation the poet has described—just to take the first word as a kind of clue to the sentiment, and then fill up the rest from the music. Not but that it would be all the better if we could have a *libretto* from the pen of a Goldoni or a Beaumarchais; it would give an additional charm to the music, and we might peruse it without destroying the charm of the scene before us. But, as Gol-

Coleridge, and the *Peter Bell* of Wordsworth.—An author has remarked, that it demands just as much wit to criticise such verses as to make them.

doni's are rare now a-days, it is a lucky circumstance that the charming art which engages our attention can make us so readily pardon the absence of good poetry. I observed at Vicenza, that they ran it over the first evening, to form a general idea of the action; they skimmed over the heads of the airs and recitative, just to observe the nature of the passion, or the shade of sentiment which the music was to describe. Never, during the next forty representations, did it ever come into any one's head to open the little volume with the blue cover.

Apprehensive of the disagreeable effect of the said *libretto*, Madame B----, of Venice, would never suffer it to be brought into her box, not even on the first representation. She caused a summary of the action to be drawn out on a sheet of paper, and afterwards Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, &c. marked out the subjects of each air, duet, or connected piece; for example—Jealousy of *Ser Taddeo*—Passionate love of *Lindor*—Coquetry of *Isabella* with the Bey, &c. I observed that every one found this very convenient.

The air of *Isabella*, in the second act,

ought to be of a more coquettish character; on this occasion Rossini has not been so happy as in the duet described above. The elegant and redoubted roulades of Isabella leave the imagination of the spectator cold and unmoved. The ground of the stuff is poor, and one is forced to observe, whether one will or not, that these ornaments are employed to conceal poverty, and not to heighten the magnificence of the effect.

Nothing can be more gay and captivating than the conclusion of the *terzetto*, "*Fra gli amori e le belezze;*" and the little delicate and tender trait, "*Se mai torno a miei paesi,*" which is thrown in, as if by accident, amidst the giddy whirl of this comic scene, produces an admirable effect from the force of contrast.

I should not hesitate to declare that the concluding scene of this opera is an historical monument. What! I shall be asked, an historical monument in the finale of an *opera buffa?* Yes, contrary as it may be to all rules, such is the case.

"Pensa alla patria, e intrepido
Il tuo dovere adempi;
Pensa che vide Italia

Risplendere gli esempi
D'ardire e di valor."*

At the moment of the composition of these words a new and happier era had begun to dawn upon Italy: patriotism, that for more than three centuries had been banished from her soil, began to revive again. Rossini could read this feeling in the souls of his audience, and knew how to enkindle it to enthusiasm. But, no sooner has he awakened these reveries, and inspired such lofty sentiments, by the beautiful and affecting melody of this passage, than he at once calls off their attention by the "*Sciocco, tu ridi ancora?*"† The baseness of a certain party, who protested against the revival of these generous and awakening sentiments, and laughed at the idea of regenerating Italy, was held up to scorn in the "*Vanne! mi fai dispetto,*"‡ which was always followed by a tumult of applause.

* Think on thy native land, and dare
Fearless thy duty to fulfil;
Remember that fair Italy
Has often witness'd 'midst her sons
Deeds of high valour and emprize.

† Fool! do you mock me still?

‡ Go! you awaken my contempt.

The expression given to the words "*Rivedrem le patrie arene*,"* is in the highest degree soothing and tender. The love of country is here so warmly expressed as almost to assume the character of another and more ardent passion.

In Venice, in particular,—in that city which had enjoyed its era of freedom later than many others,—the appearance of the "*Italiana*" was hailed with an enthusiasm of which it would be difficult to give the reader any adequate idea. Of all the cities of Italy, this is also the most gay and the most free from the besetting sin of pedantry. Such people could not fail to be pleased with a music that possesses so much more of spirit and gaiety than of depth and passion. Never was an opera more adapted to the character of a people than this, and therefore to this day it continues to be a favourite.

Such was the run that this new piece obtained, that Rossini had leisure to indulge for some time in his natural indolence, for indolent he was to excess. This the following anecdote will serve to prove.

* Again shall we behold our native shore.

During his residence in Venice this year, (1813) he lodged in a little room at one of the small inns. When the weather was cold he used to lie and write his music in bed, in order to save the expense of firing. On one of these occasions, a duet, which he had just finished for a new opera, "*Il Figlio per Azzardo*," slipped from the bed, and fell on the floor. Rossini peeped for it in vain from under the bed clothes, it had fallen under the bed. After many a painful effort, he crept from his snug place, and leaned over the side of the bed to look for it. He sees it, but it lies beyond the reach of his arm; he makes one or two ineffectual efforts to reach it, he is half frozen with cold, and, wrapping himself up in the coverlid, exclaims, "Curse the duet, I will write it over again; there will be nothing difficult in this, since I know it by heart." He began again, but not a single idea could he retrace; he fidgets about for some time,—he scrawls,—but not a note can he recall. Still his indolence will not let him get out of bed to reach the unfortunate paper. "Well!" he exclaims in a fit of impatience, "I will re-write the whole duet. Let such composers as are rich enough keep

fires in their chambers. I cannot afford it. There let the confounded paper lie. It has fallen, and it would not be lucky to pick it up again."

He had scarcely finished the second duet when one of his friends entered. "Have the goodness to reach me the duet that lies under the bed." The friend poked it out with his cane, and gave it to Rossini. "Come," says the composer, snuggling close in his bed, "I will sing you these two duets, and do you tell me which pleases you best." The friend gave the preference to the first; the second was too rapid and too lively for the situation in which it was to stand. Another thought came into Rossini's head; he seized his pen, and without loss of time worked it up into a terzetto for the same opera. The person from whom I had this anecdote, assures me, that there was not the slightest resemblance between the two duets. The terzetto finished, Rossini dressed himself in haste, cursing the cold the whole time, and set off with his friend to the *casino*, to warm himself and take a cup of coffee. After this, he sent the lad of the *casino* with the duet and the terzetto to the copyist of "*San Mosè*," to be inserted in the score.

CHAP. IV.

Rossini at Milan—La Pietra del Paragone—*Anecdote of Marcolini*—*Rossini's Crescendo.*

In the autumn of the same year (1812,) Rossini was engaged (*scriturato*) at Milan. The reader curious in theatrical history may perhaps wish to know the nature of this *scritura.* It consists of an agreement, usually printed on two pages, containing the reciprocal obligations on the part of the *maestro,* or singer, and on that of the *impressario,* or manager.* Various are the intrigues set on foot in the engagement of first-rate talents, and singular the manœuvres

* In Italy it is set down as nothing short of a miracle if one of these *impressarj* happens to escape bankruptcy, and regularly pays his singers and *maestro.* When it is known what poor devils some of these gentry are, one has really cause to pity the poor *maestro,* who is obliged to depend on such creatures for the means of subsistence. The first impression produced at beholding an Italian *impressario* is, that the moment he can scrape twenty sequins together, he will show the money as a temptation to some tailor to make him a decent coat to his back, and then that he will start with his sequins, coat and all.

resorted to. I would recommend it to the attention of the traveller to examine into this kind of diplomacy; it will be found, if not more instructing, at least much more amusing than the other. In this art, as in that of painting, the customs of the country where it had its birth are mixed up with the theory of the art, and frequently tend to explain many of these processes. The genius of Rossini has been frequently influenced by the *scritura* which he has signed. On one occasion, it prevented him from accepting a handsome pension of 3000 fr. offered him by a certain prince, who would not have forced him

——in spite
Of nature and his stars to write,

but would have allowed him to wait for the favourable moment of inspiration,—a circumstance that would have given a new character to the productions of his genius. Other composers have had a year or more allowed them for the composition of an opera: Rossini, animated perhaps by the recollection of the prolific days of painting, has, like another Guido, been driven to the necessity of composing an opera in the course of a few weeks,

in order to furnish the means of paying his landlord and his washer-woman. Perhaps one ought to apologize to delicate readers for entering into these homely details; but truth is truth, and a writer of biography should not sacrifice it to mere delicacy. The difficulty under these circumstances is to struggle against the humiliating feelings that such a state of things is apt to produce, and which too often prove hostile to the energies of the imagination. Happily for Rossini, such an effect was not produced upon his finer faculties; he preserved all the vigour and freshness of his genius, under circumstances that might have depressed a less elastic spirit.

For the *Scala*, Rossini composed "*La Pietra del Paragone.*" He had now attained his twentieth year. His opera had the good fortune to be sustained by the talents of *Signora Marcolini*, *Galli*, *Bonoldi*, and *Parlamagni*, who were in the flower of their fame, and obtained a success for this piece, which was little short of extravagance.

"*La Pietra del Paragone*" (the Touchstone) is considered by some critics as the *chef-d'œuvre* of Rossini in the *buffa* style. As the

story and situations of this piece are more interesting than these things usually are, and as the opera is unknown among us, a short analysis may not prove unacceptable.

The young Count *Asdrubal* comes into a large fortune, and is anxious to find some means, some *touchstone,* by which to try the hearts of the friends and mistress, who have come to him, together with his fortune. A man of vulgar mind would have felt happy in the midst of the flattery and caresses by which he was surrounded. Such is not the case with the Count *Asdrubal;* while every thing smiles around him, his heart is oppressed with unhappiness. He is in love with the Marchioness *Clarice,* a young widow, who with a party of friends is come to spend her *villegiatura* in his palace, situated in the midst of the forest of Viterbo. But an apprehension haunts the Count's mind, that it may be his fortune only that has an attraction in the eyes of Clarice. The Count has an intimate friend, a young poet, who is free from vanity and affectation, but not free from love. *Jocondo,* such is the name of the young enthusiast, is also in love with the Marchioness, but he sus-

pects that Asdrubal is preferred before him. Clarice, on her side, thinks that, if she betrays her passion to the Count, he may believe her actuated by interested motives, in the hopes of obtaining a large fortune.

Among the crowd of parisites and flatterers with which the chateau of the Count abounds, *Don Marforio*, a journalist of the country, stands prominent. He is an intriguing, cowardly, boasting fellow, but no fool, and his business is to make every body laugh, in concert with a certain *Don Pacuvio*, a desperate newsmonger, who has always some important secret to entrust to the world. Among the company at the chateau are two young ladies, distant relations of the Count, and who would have no objection to accept his hand. For this purpose they have recourse to all the little contrivances usual on such occasions, and *Don Marforio* is their intimate friend and adviser.

At the rising of the curtain all these characters are brought into action in a manner at once lively and picturesque, in a splendid chorus: *Don Pacuvio* has a piece of news to communicate, of the last consequence to the friends of the Count, and to the two young ladies who seek the honour of his hand.

The newsmonger meets with a very poor reception from the company; and ends by getting into a furious passion, and putting his whole auditory to flight. He is pacified by the arrival of the young poet, *Jocondo*, and they sing a literary duet together, which, the world may well imagine, is not a whit more lively on that account. "I annihilate a thousand poets by a single *colpo di giornale*," (blow of my journal,) says the man of gall: "But only make your court to me, and glory shall be the reward."—"I would not purchase it at such a price!" cries the young poet, "what can there be in common between a journal and myself?" Upon the whole, this *duetto* is extremely poignant, and it required the talents of a Rossini to set it with due effect. It is admired for its levity, spirit, and the total absence of any thing like passion. The malignant journalist, finding *Jocondo* invulnerable on the side of vanity, leaves him with a sly hit at his unfortunate love for *Clarice*: "Greatness of soul is all very well," says he, "but it rarely gains the day in competition with a few round thousands." This melancholy truth appears to give the young poet no small uneasiness. On their departure, the amiable *Clarice* appears, and

sings the well known cavatina, "*Ecco pietosa, tu sei la sola*!" which is almost as celebrated in Italy as the air of "*Tancredi*" itself.

We know what resources there are in music to paint hopeless love. In the present instance, there is a delicate shade in the feeling,—it is not a passion, opposed by the vulgar obstacle of a father or a guardian, but of a self-created fear of appearing mean and base in the eyes of the object of its affections.

She addresses her sorrows to the echos of the grove:

"Ecco pietosa, tu sei la sola
Che mi consoli nell mio dolor.*"

While *Clarice* is singing this, the Count, who happens to be behind a neighbouring thicket, imitates the echo. When *Clarice* says; *Quel dirmi o Dio, non t'amo!*† the Count replies "*T'amo.*" The effect of this situation produces an illusion delightful in the extreme.

For an instant *Clarice* is happy, but the Count's avowal of tenderness was but of a passing nature; she meets him a moment

* Pitying echo, thou alone
Dost fondly answer to my moan.

† To hear thee say, ne'er can I love thee!

after, he is as gay and as amiable, but as coldly polite, as before. He is forming his grand plan; he is seen to give his last commands to his faithful steward, who is to second his views. The unfortunate passion of *Jocondo* for *Clarice* has not escaped his notice, and he is happy of an opportunity, in his supposed absence, of witnessing whether his friend will strive to conquer this passion. Finally the Count disappears, to return shortly after in the disguise of a Turk. Accompanied by a legal officer, the Turk comes and presents the steward, in the absence of his master, with a letter of exchange, in three valid forms, signed by the father of Count Asdrubal, the amount of which, two millions of franks, will absorb nearly the whole of the Count's fortune. The steward does not fail to recognize as true and valid the signature of his master's father, and all the world believes the Count a ruined man. At this moment commences one of the most masterly *buffa* finales that Rossini ever composed.

Sigillara (a seal) is the barbarous, half-Italian, word with which the Turk in disguise answers all the objections made to him.

He wishes to put seals to every thing and every place. This kind of cant word, which is repeated by the Turk on all occasions, and in every possible tone, made such an impression upon the good people of Milan, that they adopted it at once as the name of the piece. If you were to talk of "*Pietra del Paragone*" in Lombardy, nobody would understand you: you must say "*Il Sigillara.*"

The effect of the *Sigillara* finale was quite magical. People ran in crowds to Milan, from Parma, Piacenza, Bergamo, Brescia, and all the towns within twenty leagues distance. Rossini was the first man of his age; nothing was in every mouth but Rossini; all the world ran to see him as a prodigy. Love was not tardy in hastening to recompense the musician who was such an enthusiastic in its praise. Dazzled by the glories that surrounded him, the prettiest, perhaps, of the pretty women of Lombardy fell desperately in love with him. Faithful heretofore to her duties, and cited as a pattern of young and prudent wives, she at once forgot her own reputation, abandoned her palace and her husband, and publicly

stole away her favourite from the arms of Marcolini. Was not this a just vengeance upon the latter, for her having exerted the tyranny of her charms, at the expense of the former protectresses of Rossini?

"Infelix! te nunc fata impia tangunt."

Rossini made his new devotee the first musician probably in all Italy; seated by her side at her piano-forte, and at her country-house at B....., he composed the greater part of those airs and *cantilenas* which afterwards made the fortune of his thirty operas.

Every thing at this period was peace and happiness in Lombardy. Milan, the brilliant capital of a new kingdom, and where the tribute of folly exacted by the sovereign was less than that of the neighbouring states, saw all the means of making a fortune, and all the sources of pleasure and amusement, set in activity. It is with countries as with individuals,—it is not the *being* rich that produces happiness, but the *becoming* so. The new manners of Milan assumed a vigour unknown since the middle age. Count *Prina* was all activity in the field of politics, *Appiani* in that of painting, and

Monti in that of poetry; and yet there was nothing like affectation, no prudery, no blind enthusiasm for Napoleon; they only gave him flattery in proportion as he paid for it in ready money.

The happiness that thus reigned in Lombardy had something still more interesting in it, because it was on the point of being again destroyed. I know not what vague presentiment made the Milanese already lend a boding ear to the sound of cannon that muttered in the north. At the very moment that "*La Pietra del Paragone*" was exciting such enthusiasm, the work of desolation was going on upon the banks of the Borysthenes.

Notwithstanding the natural indifference of Rossini, a feeling which he affects perhaps, but upon which he certainly prides himself too much, he cannot sometimes help speaking out in terms of enthusiasm, so rare with him, of this delightful epoch of his youth, when his happiness was blended with that of a whole people, who, after three hundred years of depression, had again launched forth into happiness.

The second act of "*La Pietro del Paragone,*" opens with a *quartetto,* unique in the works of Rossini; it is most perfectly expressive of the tone and charm of an agreeable conversation, between persons of a lively and animated turn, who utter their sentiments without restraint.

This is followed by a comic duel between Don Marforio the journalist, who has had the insolence to speak of love to the Marchioness, and Jocondo, who, though he meets with no return of love, resolves to avenge the insult offered to her. The Journalist, being hard pushed by his antagonist, exclaims:

"Dirò ben di voi nel mio giornale."
"Potentissimi Dei! sarebbe questa
"Una ragione piu forte
"Per ammazzarti subito."*

The quarrel becomes more complicated by the arrival of the Count, who threatens Marforio with vengeance for an article he

* *Mar.* Sir, I'll say something handsome in my journal
Respecting you.
Joc. Eternal Gods! why this
Will be a stronger reason why at once
I should dispatch thee on the spot.

has inserted in his journal, relative to his misfortunes. The grand *terzetto* which results from this situation, may bear a comparison with the celebrated duel in the "*Nemici generosi*" of Cimarosa.

The forced pleasantry of the cowardly journalist, who wishes to terminate the affair affably,

> "Con quel che resta ucciso
> Io poi mi batterò,"

is delicious in music.

The song, "*Ecco i soliti saluti,*" which is sung while the two friends take their swords, which are brought by two lacqueys in full livery, on large plateaus of silver, and make their *saluts* according to the etiquette of fencing, is perfect. The ideas which it awakens are exactly of that degree of seriousness which is necessary to deceive a man of some wit, who is overcome with fear.

This terzetto, which would be delicious in any place, is, by circumstances, rendered doubly so in Italy, where they take a malicious pleasure in playing off their jokes *ad hominem*, against the official journalist, who, in spite of the high powers

by whom he is protected, frequently experiences the same rough treatment which *Scapin* affects to treat with such contempt. At Milan its success was altogether extravagant; the actor who performed *Don Marforio* contrived to obtain a full suit of clothes, which was at once recognized to have been worn by the journalist, who wrote under the protection of the police.

This opera finishes with a grand air like the "*Italiano in Algeri.*" Nothing would do with Marcolini but she must appear in man's clothes, and Rossini was obliged to arrange matters with the poet so as to allow *Clarice* to disguise herself as a captain of hussars, in order to contrive and draw from the Count an avowal of his love. Nobody in Milan, not even the journalist who had been made the subject of so much mirth, imagined there was any thing absurd in the circumstance of a young Roman lady, of the first distinction, disguising herself in the uniform of a captain of hussars, and coming to salute the public, sword in hand, at the head of her troop. Had Marcolini asked to sing on horseback, Rossini would have consented.

It was at Milan, that Rossini stole the idea of his *crescendo,* since so celebrated, from a composer of the name of Mosca, who flew into an outrageous passion when he heard of the circumstance, and threatened vengeance against the thief:

Tantæne animis celestibus iræ?*

CHAP. V.

Rossini revisits Pesaro—Escapes the Conscription—Envy—Rossini and M. Berton—Rossini's Adventures at Bologna.

After obtaining such distinguished success at Milan, Rossini revisited Pesaro, and his family, to whom he is warmly attached. The only person with whom he has been known to correspond is his mother, and his letters to her are thus singularly addressed:

All' ornatissima Signora Rossini,
Madre del celebre Maestro,
In Bologna.†

* In heavenly minds can such resentment dwell?

† To the most honoured Signora Rossini, mother of the celebrated Master, in Bologna.

Such is the character of a man, who, half in jest, half in earnest, scruples not to make an avowal of the glory that surrounds him, and laughs at the modest prudery of the academy. Deriving happiness from the effects produced by his genius, upon a people the most sensitive upon earth, and intoxicated with the voice of praise from his very cradle, he believes implicitly in his own celebrity, and cannot see why a man, gifted like Rossini, should not rank in the same degree as a general of division or a minister of state. They have gained a grand prize in the lottery of ambition, he has gained a grand prize in the lottery of nature. This is one of Rossini's own phrases; I heard it from his own lips, says his biographer, at a party given by Prince Ghigi at Rome, in 1819.

About the time of his journey to Pesaro, an attention was shewn him as honorable as it was rare, and which is equally creditable to the giver and the receiver: his genius proved the means of his exemption from the almost universal operation of the miserable conscription laws. The minister of the Interior ventured to propose to

Prince Eugene, the Viceroy of Italy, an exception in his favour. The Prince at first hesitated, through fear of a reprimand from head-quarters at Paris, the daily advices from which were most pressing and most rigorous upon this point; but he at length yielded to the decided feelings of the public.

After this narrow escape of being sent for a soldier, Rossini went to Bologna, where the same adventures awaited him as at Milan,—the enthusiasm of the public, and the more grateful meed of the smiles of beauty.

The rigorists of Bologna, so celebrated in Italy for the severity of their critical taste, and who exercise the same dictatorship over music, as the members of the French Academy did over the three unities, reproached him, and not without reason, with having sometimes transgressed against the rules of composition. Rossini did not deny the justice of the charge. "I should not have so many faults to reproach myself with," was his reply, "if I had leisure to read my manuscript twice over; but you know very well, that scarcely six weeks are

allowed me to compose an Opera. I take my pleasure during the first month; and, pray, when would you have me take my pleasure if not at my present age, and with my present success? Would you have me wait till I am grown old and full of spleen. At length the two last weeks arrive; I compose every morning a duo or air, which is to be rehearsed that very evening. How then would you have me detect little faults of grammar in the accompaniments, (*l'instrumentazione*)?"

Notwithstanding the candour of this excuse, a great bustle was made in the musical circles of Bologna respecting those faults of grammar. This is the same complaint that the pedants of his time made against Voltaire, whom they accused of not knowing orthography. So much the worse for orthography, was the dry remark of Rivarol.

After listening as patiently as possible to the declamation of these pedants against Rossini for violating the rules of composition, a celebrated critic made this reply: "Pray, who laid down these rules? Were they made by persons superior in genius to the author of "*Tancredi?*" Does stupidity

cease to be stupidity because sanctioned by antiquity, and the usages of the schools? Let us examine these pretended rules a little more closely: and, pray, what are we to say of rules that can be infringed without the public perceiving it, and without our pleasure being in the least diminished?"

M. Berton, of the Institute, has renewed this dispute at Paris. The fact is, that the faults here complained of are scarcely perceptible while listening to the operas of Rossini. It is like objecting as a crime to Voltaire, that he does not employ the same phrases and terms of expression as La Bruyère and Montesquieu. The second of these great writers has this memorable sentence: "A member of the French Academy writes as they write; a man of wit writes as *he* writes."

The truth is, that a knot of composers, who found themselves crushed in a few months by the success of an idle reckless youth of twenty, were glad of a pretext for giving vent to their envy. When reproaches of this kind are kept up by a certain class, they are sure of producing a certain effect, and will not fail to be repeated

as long as Rossini continues to be applauded. A mere technical exposition of the objections raised by these pedants would fill a dozen pages; and, as their introduction would only serve to weary the reader's patience, I shall pass them over in silence, and confine my observations to M. Berton. In his work entitled "*De la Musique méchanique et de la Musique philosophique*," he has hazarded the following remarks: "It does not appear that this Italian has made any advance beyond that music which is merely mechanical;" and in another place he attempts to prove that the author of Othello has made nothing but *arabesques* in music. These are daring assertions in the mouth of a man who is no obscure journalist, no second-rate composer, but a vigorous champion of the art, who has gained many laurels of triumph. The author of *Montano*, of *Aline*, and *Délire*, is a name upon which the anti-Rossinians may well pride themselves. At last the prejudices of the profession stand avowed in the person of one of its active disciples, and the counter-revolution in music has for its champion a member of the Institute. When my reader asks me what I have to

oppose to so great a name, I shall merely recommend him to go to the Theatre Feydeau this evening to witness "*Montano et Stéphanie*," and to-morrow to the Italian Opera to hear "*Tancredi*." Apparently M. Berton has not fallen into those faults of composition with which he so superciliously reproaches M. Rossini: well, all I ask of the reader is, to lay his hand on his heart, and honestly declare what is the difference between the two works?

Rossini is full of grammatical faults: well, be it so; and yet there is not a village in Italy which could not furnish a dozen of these critics upon notes, who, for a single sequin, would undertake to correct the errors in any one of Rossini's operas. I have heard another objection started: the poor in spirit are scandalized at seeing that he does not *turn his ideas to the best account*. This is like the miser, who would give the name of fool to a rich and happy man who should throw down a guinea to a little peasant girl in exchange for a nosegay. It is not given to all the world to know the pleasure of a little bit of thoughtless extravagance.

But it was at Bologna that poor Rossini

was doomed to a more serious embarrassment than that of the mere outcry of pedants. His Milanese admirer abandoned her splendid palace, her husband, her children, and her fortune, and early one morning plunged, as if from the clouds, into the little chamber of his lodging, which was any thing but elegant. The first moments were all tenderness, but scarce had the transports of their meeting subsided, when the door opened, and in rushed one of the most celebrated and most beautiful women of Bologna, (the Princess C . . . .). A scene ensued which the comic pencil of Gay has already anticipated in the Beggar's Opera. The reckless Rossini laughed at the rival queens; sung them, like another Macheath, one of his own *buffa* songs; and then made his escape, leaving them gazing on each other in dumb amazement.

CHAP. VI.

The Impressario *and his Theatre—Mode of getting up an Opera—Anecdote of Rossini and the Cardinal —Picture of an Italian Green-room—The first Evening of a new Opera—Rossini's Waggery.*

After his success at Bologna, which is considered as the head-quarters of Italian music, Rossini received offers from almost every town in Italy. Every *impressario* (director) was required, as a *sine qua non*, to furnish his theatre with an opera from the pen of Rossini. The consideration he generally received for an opera was a thousand francs (about 40*l.*) and he generally wrote from four to five in a year.

The mechanism of an Italian theatre is as follows: the *impressario* is frequently one of the most wealthy and considerable persons of the little town he inhabits. It most commonly proves a ruinous undertaking. He forms a company, consisting of a *prima donna, tenore,* basso cantante, basso buffo*, a

* By the term *tenore* is understood the strong *breast-voice* in the upper tones, in opposition to the *head voice*, which is called *falsetto*. The *opera buffa*

second female singer, and a third *basso*. He engages a *maestro* (composer) to write a new opera, who has to adapt his airs to the voices and capacities of the company. The poem *(libretto)* is purchased at the rate of from 60 to 80 francs, from some unlucky son of the Muses, who is generally a poor hungry abbè, the hanger-on to some rich family of the neighbourhood. The character of the parasite, so admirably painted by Terence, is still found in all its glory in Lombardy, where the smallest town can boast of five or six families, with an income of five thousand livres. The *impressario*, who, as we before observed, is generally the head of one of these families, entrusts the care of the financial department of the concern, to a *registrario*, who is commonly some pettifogging lawyer, who holds the situation of his steward. The next thing that usually happens is that the *impressario* falls in love with the *prima donna;* and

and the opera *di mezzo carattere* are generally written for common tenors, and which from that circumstance are called *tenori di mezzo caraltere.* The *opera seria* is the proper field for the display of the true tenor voice.

one of the great objects of curiosity among the gossips of the little town, is to know if he will give her his arm in public.

The troop, thus organized, at length gives its first representation, after a month of cabals and intrigues that form subjects of conversation for the whole period. This *prima recita* forms an era of the utmost importance in the simple annals of this little town, and of which larger towns can form no idea. During whole months, eight or ten thousand persons do nothing but discuss the merits and defects both of the music and singers, with all the stormy vivacity which is native to the Italian clime. This first representation, if no unforeseen disaster occur, is generally followed by twenty or thirty others; after which the company breaks up. This is what is generally called a *stagione* (season.) The last and best is that of the carnival. The singers who are not *scritturati* (engaged) in any of these companies, are usually to be found at Milan or Bologna; there they have agents, whose business it is to find them engagements, or to manœuvre them into better situations when an opportunity offers.

From this little sketch of theatrical arrangements in Italy, some idea may be easily formed of the kind of life which Rossini led from 1810 to 1816. During this period, he visited in succession all the principal towns of Italy, remaining from three to four months in each. Wherever he arrived he was received with acclamations, and *fêted* by the *dilettanti* of the place. The first fifteen or twenty days were passed with his friends, dining out, and shrugging up his shoulders at the nonsense of the *libretto* which was given him to set to music. For, besides the fire of his own natural genius, Rossini was inspired with a good taste by his first admirer (the Countess P . . . . . of Pesaro.) She had read with him the works of Ariosto and Metastasio, as well as the comedies of Machiavel, the *Fiabe* of Gozzi, and the poems of Burati; he is therefore fully competent to judge of the worthlessness of these *libretti*. "*Tu mi hai dato versi, ma non situazioni,*"* have I heard him frequently repeat to an unhappy votary

* You have given me verses, but not situations.

of the nine, who stammered out a thousand excuses, and two hours after came to salute him in a sonnet, "*umiliato alla gloria del più gran maestro d'Italia e del mondo.**"

After two or three weeks spent in this dissipated manner, Rossini begins to refuse invitation to dinners and musical *soirèes*, and falls to work in good earnest. He occupies himself in studying the voices of the performers, he makes them sing at the piano, and, on more than one occasion, he has been driven to the mortifying necessity of mutilating and "curtailing of their fair proportions," some of his most brilliant and happy ideas, because the tenor could not reach the note which was necessary to express the composer's feeling, or because the *prima donna* always sung false in some particular tone. Sometimes, in a whole company, he could find no one but a bass who could sing at all. At length, about three weeks before the first representation, having acquired a competent knowledge of the voices, he begins to write. He rises late, and passes the day in composing in the midst of the conversation of his

* Inscribed with all humility to the glory of the greatest composer of Italy, and of the world.

new friends; who, with the most provoking politeness, will not quit him for a single instant. The day of the first representation is now rapidly approaching, and yet he cannot resist the pressing solicitations of these friends to dine with them *a l'Osteria*. This of course leads to a supper; the sparkling champagne circulates freely; the hours of morning steal on apace. At length a compunctious visiting shoots across the mind of the truant *maestro;* he rises abruptly; his friends will see him to his own door; they parade the silent streets with heads unbonneted, shouting some musical impromptu, perhaps a portion of a *miserere*, to the great scandal and annoyance of the good Catholics in their beds. At length he reaches his house, and shuts himself up in his chamber, and it is at this, to every-day mortals, most ungenial hour, that he is visited by some of the most brilliant of his inspirations. These he hastily scratches down upon odds and ends of paper, and next morning arranges them, or, to use his own phrase, *instruments* them, amidst the same interruptions of conversation as before. Figure to yourself a quick and ardent mind, susceptible of every impression, and capable

of turning to advantage the most trifling occurrence or passing observation. When composing his "*Mosé*," some one said to him—"What, you are going to make the Hebrew sing! do you mean to make them *twang it* as they do in the Synagogue?" The idea struck him at once, and he sketched out on the spot a rough draft of the magnificent chorus so much admired in this opera, and which is observed to begin with a kind of nasal twang, peculiar to the Synagogue.

There is one thing, however, which, from my own observation, says his biographer, I know has the effect of paralizing the mind of this brilliant genius, ever creative, ever in action,—and that is the presence of a pedant who pesters him about glory and theory, and overwhelms him with learned compliments. It is then that he takes refuge from disgust in broad humour and waggery, though the pleasantries in which he indulges are sometimes more remarkable for their coarse and grotesque energy, than for any great sprinkling of attic salt. As in Italy, there is no supercilious court, which, among its other amusements, reckons that of purifying the language as one, and as no-

body stickles about his rank when a joke and a laugh is in question, hence the vocabulary of such terms as are reputed gross and indecorous, is comparatively small. This may in some degree account, I will not say apologize, for the particular colouring of the poetry of *Monti*; that is noble—that is admirable—that is sublime;—and yet all this awakens nothing of the delicate scruples and timid prudery of more northern courts."

A certain pedant, a *Monsignore* by profession, had rushed without ceremony into Rossini's chamber, in his little inn, to pay his early respects, and was hindering him from rising with "*Ella mi vanta per mia gloria,*" &c." when Rossini interrupted him: "*Monsignore,* you are going to say something about my glory; do you know what is my real title to immortality? Nothing less than that of being the handsomest made man of my age. Canova tells me that he means to take an early opportunity of modeling me for a statue of Achilles." At these words he jumped out of bed without more ado, and stood before the eyes of the astonished *Monsignore* in the complete costume of Achilles; this was certainly failing in

respect to a Roman prelate. "Do you see this arm,—do you see this leg?" continued he; "when one is made after this fashion, surely one is certain of immortality!" He ran on rambling in this way, till the prelate, thinking he was taken with a sudden mad fit, fled for his life out of the chamber.

The labour of composition is nothing to Rossini; it is the rehearsal that annoys him. It is during those bitter moments that the *povero maestro* has to undergo the torture of hearing his happiest ideas, his sweetest and most brilliant airs, disfigured by every dissonance of which the human voice is capable. "It is enough to make one hiss oneself," would Rossini exclaim. He goes away from the rehearsal mortified to death; what pleased him in the morning, now fills him with disgust.

Yet, painful as such rehearsals may be to a young composer, I cannot help considering them, (says his biographer,) as the triumph of Italian sensibility. It is there that, assembled round a crazy piano, in an out-house (here dignified by the name of *ridotto*, green-room,) of the theatre of some little town, such as Reggio or Villetri, I

have seen eight or ten poor devils of actors rehearse to the accompaniment of the noise and clatter of a neighbouring kitchen; I have heard them catch at once the most fugitive and rapid impressions that music could produce. It is here that the amateur of the north would stand astonished to hear persons, perfectly ignorant of music, incapable of playing a common waltz on the piano, or even of describing the difference between one tone and another, sing and accompany *by instinct*, and with admirable spirit, music the most singular and original, and composed by the master almost under their very eyes. They commit a hundred faults; but, in music, such faults as are committed only through an excess of feeling or an over-earnestness to excel, are instantly pardoned, like those faults in love which proceed from an excess of ardour. I may be allowed to add, that these rehearsals, which so much charmed me—an ignorant and untutored man, would doubtless have sadly scandalized M. Berton of the Institute.

A plain-dealing man, a stranger to Italy, would not hesitate at once to acknowledge,

that nothing is so absurd as to think of forming composers and singers at any great distance from Vesuvius.* In this land of the beautiful, the child at the breast is familiarized to song, though not exactly to such airs as *Malbrouk*, or *C'est l'amour, l'amour*. Under a burning climate, where tyranny has fixed its reign, where to speak has danger in it, happiness or despair express themselves more naturally by the plaintiveness of song than by the conventional signs of language. Nothing is here spoken of but music; no opinions are allowed to be discussed with freedom but those that relate to music.

We left Rossini rehearsing his opera at a crazy piano, in the *ridotto* of some little theatre, say Pavia or Imola. If this little obscure green-room is sometimes the sanctuary of musical genius and of an enthusiasm for the arts, there are also times when it becomes the arena on which lofty pretensions and wounded pride descend to settle their furious, and not unfrequently grotesque, disputes. The crazy piano has witnessed many

* Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento,
Virgil.

of these tumultuous scenes: nay, there have been moments when the poor instrument itself was not allowed to remain neutral; it has been broken by many an infuriate fist, and hurled in fragments at the heads of the combatants. I strongly advise the curious traveller who makes the tour of Italy, and feels an interest in the arts, not to neglect this spectacle. The interior of this green-room forms a topic of conversation for a whole town. Their future pleasure or *ennui*, during the gayest month of the year, chiefly depends upon the success or failure of the new opera, and this is again dependent, in a great degree, upon the good or bad understanding that exists between the members of this irritable synod. Wrapt up in their intense anxiety about the issue of the event, this little town forgets for a time that there is any thing else going on in the world; and it is during this state of uncertainty that the *impressario* plays an admirable part; his vanity knows no bounds; he is all swagger and pompous importance, and is, to the very letter, the first man in his part of the world. I have seen bankers, and men of avarice too, not regret the purchase of these flatter-

ing honours at the loss of fifteen hundred louis. The poet *Sografi* has written a charming little piece, in one act, on the adventures and pretensions of a strolling company of singers. It contains the character of a German tenor, who does not understand a word of Italian, which is laughable in the extreme. Yet *outré* as some of the characters are which he has painted, they have had their living representations. *Marchesi,* the famous soprano of Milan, could never, in the latter years of his theatrical career, be prevailed upon to sing the opening song, unless either mounted on horseback, or stationed on the top of some lofty eminence. At all events, the plume of white feathers, that nodded on his helmet, must not be less than six feet in height.

Even in our times, Crivelli refuses to sing his first air, unless it contains the words *felice ognora,* on which he finds it so convenient to run his divisions.

But let us return to our little Italian town, which we left in the anxiety, or rather in the agitation, that proceeds the day of the first representation of an opera.—At length the most important of evenings arrives.

The *maestro* takes his place at the piano; the theatre overflows; people have flocked from ten leagues distance. The curious form an encampment around the theatre in their calashes; all the inns are filled to excess, where insolence reigns at its height. All occupations have ceased; at the moment of the performance, the town has the aspect of a desert. All the passions, all the solicitudes, all the life of a whole population is concentrated in the theatre.

The overture commences; so intense is the attention, that the buzzing of a fly could be heard. On its conclusion the most tremendous uproar ensues. It is either applauded to the clouds, or hissed or rather howled at without mercy. It is not in Italy as in other countries, where the first representation is seldom decisive, and where either vanity or timidity prevents each man from intruding his individual opinion, lest it should be found in discordance with the opinions of the majority. In an Italian theatre, they shout, they scream, they stamp, they belabour the backs of the seats with their canes, with all the violence of persons possessed. It is thus that they

force upon others the judgment which they have formed, and strive to prove that it is the *only* sound one; for, strange to say, there is no intolerance equal to that of the eminently sensitive. When you see a man moderate and reasonable in what regards the arts, begin to talk to him of history, politics, or political œconomy; such a man will make a distinguished magistrate, a good physician, a sound lawyer, an excellent academician, in a word, whatever you will, except an enthusiast in music or painting.

At the close of each air the same terrific uproar ensues; the bellowings of an angry sea could give but a faint idea of its fury.

Such, at the same time, is the taste of an Italian audience, that they at once distinguish whether the merit of an air belongs to the singer or the composer. The cry is *bravo David! bravo Pesaroni!* or the whole theatre resounds with *bravo maestro!* Rossini then rises from his place at the piano, his countenance wearing an air of gravity, a thing very unusual with him; he makes three obeisances, which are followed by salvos of applause, mingled with a variety

of short and panegyrical phrases. This done they proceed to the next piece.

Rossini presides at the piano during the three first representations, after which he receives his 800 or 1000 francs, is invited to a grand parting dinner, given by his friends, that is to say, by the whole town, and he then starts in his *veturino,* with his portmanteau much fuller of music-paper than of other effects, to commence a similar course, in some other town forty miles distant. It is usual with him to write to his mother after the first three representations, and send her and his aged father the two-thirds of the little sum he has received. He sets off with ten or twelve sequins in his pocket, the happiest of men, and doubly happy if chance should throw some fellow-traveller in his way, whom he can quiz in good earnest. On one occasion, as he was travelling *in veturino,* from Ancona to Reggio, he passed himself off for a master of music, a mortal enemy of Rossini, and filled up the time by singing the most execrable music imaginable, to some of the words of his own best airs, to show his superiority to that animal Rossini, whom

ignorant pretenders to taste had the folly to extol to the skies.

CHAP. VII.

Rossini accepts an Engagement at Milan—"Aureliano in Palmira"—*The Progress of Taste*—*Harmony* versus *Melody*—*On the present State of the Musical Grammar*—*M. Lavoisier*—*Rossini gradually adopts the German Style*—"Dimetrio e Polibio."

After terminating his engagements at Bologna, Rossini accepted an offer made him at Milan, whither he repaired in the spring of 1814. It was for the *Scala* that he composed "*Aureliano in Palmira.*" In spite of many beauties, and particularly the duet "*Se tu m'ami, O mia regina,*" which some critics have considered as the most beautiful thing of the kind that has proceeded from our composer's pen—it proved unsuccessful. It was Rossini's first failure: it annoyed him not a little, and he at once determined on changing his style.

I must entreat pardon for making a little digression in this place, but it will tend to abridge many of the discussions into which we shall hereafter be led, in following our

composer through the more stormy part of his career, when he was honoured with the hatred of pedants, and had a host of composers, great and little, leagued against him.

Envy once awakened, Rossini was no longer able to bear off the easy laurels of his earlier youth. He has always laughed at pedants: I wish he had always shown the same contempt to officious individuals, whose opinions have tended to produce an undue influence upon his works; an influence that threatens to prove fatal to his future fame.

Taste is the cant phrase of the day; let us examine a little into the simple signification of this word. As applied to the faculties of the mind, it bears a close analogy to the faculties of sense. This analogy we will consider for a moment. The unsophisticated taste of the child is pleased with the ripe and luscious peach, and revolts at strong drink and seasoned food; but, a little more advanced in age, and escaped from the trammels of his pedagogue, he affects to despise plain dishes, and nothing will do but his ragout and *sour crout*, and perhaps a glass of *eau-de-vie* in imitation

of his elders. But when arrived at that age which Danti terms

"Il mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,"*

nothing will do but strong and piquant sauces, the stimulating *curry* of the east, the powerful *curaçao* of the west. I compare—though perhaps the homely nature of such a comparison demands an apology—I compare melody, with its simple charms, to the peach which delights the child; harmony, on the contrary, to those piquant sauces, the power of which is redoubled as the palate requires more stimulus.

It was about the year 1730, that a Leo, a Vinci, and a Pergolese, invented, at Naples, airs and melodies, the most sweet and delicious, that it is possible for the human ear to enjoy. This was the age of the child.

From 1730 to 1823, the musical world, like the youth ripening into manhood, and vitiating his taste with age, has continued gradually to decline from music of a sweet and delicate, to that of a strong and piquant, nature. They have abandoned, if I may be allowed the ex-

* In the mid-passage of our life's career.

pression, the simple delicacy of the peach, for the *sour-crout*, stimulating sauces and kirchewasser of those composers who administer to their pleasures, and are content to be repaid with glory.

The revolution in music, which has been maturing during a period of more than ninety years, has had its various and successive periods. But where is it to stop? This is a question I am unable to answer. All I know is, that each period, which has generally lasted from twelve to fifteen years, about the space that a composer continues in vogue, has been considered as the term of the revolution.

As for myself, I do not hesitate to declare it as my opinion, that "*Tancredi*" is the perfection of the union of ancient melody with modern harmony; and yet I am, probably, as much the dupe of my feelings, as those who have gone before me were of theirs. But, if I am a dupe, it is of a magician, whose wand has summed up the most beautiful forms of the ideal world of music to enchant my imagination; and if, by a kind of reaction, I am unjust towards the "*Gazza Ladra*" and "*Otello*," it is because

they awaken sensations less sweet and enchanting, though, perhaps, more strong and piquant in their effects.

I beg the reader not to lose sight of this my profession of faith, whenever I employ the terms *delicious, sublime, perfect.* In moments of cooler reflection, when philosophy and respect for those good people who are not enthusiasts will predominate, I am not ignorant of the ridicule to which these terms lie exposed.

There is a common phrase in France, to indicate certain shades of opinion ;—*such a one is a patriot of* 89 : I profess myself a *Rossinian of* 1815. This was the year in which the *style* of music of "*Tancredi*" was all the vogue in Italy.*

An amateur of 1780, who is a decided admirer of the style of Paisiello and Cimarosa, would probably find "*Tancredi*" as noisy, and as overcharged with accompaniments, as I do *Otello* and *La Gazza Ladra.*

* In music, as in literature, a work may be very good in its *style*, and yet be very common in its ideas, and *vice versâ.* I prefer the style of Rossini. but allow superiority of genius to Cimarosa. The first finale of the "*Matrimonio Secreto*" is a model of perfection, both in style and ideas.

I think I cannot do better than give a list of the great composers who have all in their turn enjoyed the reputation of having carried the truly beautiful in the art to the utmost degree of perfection. On the appearance of each new genius, a violent and interminable dispute was sure to arise between the amateurs of fifty, who had seen the *good old times*, and the young ones of twenty. Indeed, this may be set down as a truth, that a man of talent always writes in the *style* (in the proportionate mixture of melody and harmony) that he finds current at his entrance into the world.*

The following is the list of those great artists whose names have always been anathematised by their immediate successors:

Alessandro Scarlatti, born at Messina, 1650, died 1730. He was the founder of the modern art of music.

Nicola Porpora, born at Naples, 1658, shone in 1710.†

* *To have a taste*, even in literature, always signifies the same as to clothe one's ideas according to the last fashion, or the latest usages of polished society. M. L'Abbé Delille had a perfect taste in 1786.

† The first operas of a master are frequently the

Francisco Durante, born at Naples, 1663, shone in 1718.

Leonardo Leo, born in 1694, shone in 1725.

Beldassare Galuppi, surnamed *Il Buranello*, from the little islet of Burano, near Venice, where he was born, 1703, shone in 1728.

Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, born in Naples, 1704, shone in 1730.

Leonardo Vinci, born in 1705, shone in 1730.

Giovanni Adolfo Hasse, born at Bergandorf, near Hamburgh, 1705, shone in 1730.

Nicolo Jomelli, born at Airllim, near Naples, 1714, shone in 1739.

Logroscino, the inventor of finales, shone in 1739.

Pietro Guglielmi, creator of the *opera buffa*, born in the Neapolitan states, 1727, shone in 1752.

Nicolo Piccini, born at Bari, 1728, shone in 1753.

Giuseppe Sarti, born at Faenza, 1730, shone in 1755.

Antonio Saccini, born at Naples, 1735, shone in 1760.

Anfossi, born in 1703, shone in 1761.

Traetta, born 1738, shone in 1763.

Paisiello, born in 1741, shone in 1766.

Zingarelli, born 1752, shone in 1778.

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best. The musical talent developes itself early; but four or five years must be granted to public opinion, before a composer can decidedly efface the impression left by his immediate predecessor. It was, upon an average, about the age of five-and-twenty, that the celebrated composers, whose names adorn this list, attained their highest degree of celebrity.

Dominico Cimarosa, born 1754, at Capo di Monti, in the kingdom of Naples, shone in 1790.

W. A. Mozart, born at Salzburg, 1756, shone in 1780.

Mayer, born 1760, shone in 1800.

Generali, born 1786, shone in 1800.

Mosca, born in 1778, shone in 1800.

Paer, born 1774, shone in 1802.

Pavisi, born 1785, shone in 1802.

Beethoven, 1772.—Morlachi, 1788.—Pacini, 1800.—Caraffa, 1793.—Mercadante, 1800.—Kreuzer, of Vienna, 1800, and Maria von Weber, the hope of the German school. These, with Rossini, are the principal artists of the living school.

There is one composer in the last list, who makes us forget the author of *Tancredi*, viz.; the author of *La Gazza Ladra*, of *Zelmira*, of *Semiramis*, of *Mosè*, of *Otello*: the Rossini of 1820.

If it would not be thought too formal, I would offer the reader a comparison. As two majestic rivers take their rise in two distant countries, extend their widening tide through realms far divided, and yet finish at last by commingling their streams in one common tide; as, for example, the Rhone and the Saone: such is the history of the two schools of music, the German and the Italian: they both had their birth in very distant cities, Dresden

and Naples. Alessandro Scarletti founded the school of Italy, and John Sebastian Bach that of Germany.

These schools, represented in the present day by Rossini and Weber, will probably form themselves into one, and it is not improbable that this memorable union may take place under our own eyes.

An important question presents itself for our consideration. Ought harmony to have a separate existence, and be allowed to claim a separate interest from melody, or simply serve to augment the effect of the latter? I acknowledge that I am of the latter opinion. I have always considered it as a principle in the fine arts, that, in general, great effects are produced by one thing eminently beautiful in its kind, and not by the union of many things of a mediocre character. When the human heart is reduced to the necessity of chusing between two pleasures different in their nature, no trifling deduction is made from its enjoyments. If I wish to hear magnificent harmony I go and listen to a symphony of Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven; but I go to the "*Matrimonio Secreto*," or "*Il Re Teodore*," if I

am to be delighted with the charms of melody. If I wish to enjoy these two pleasures combined in the happy manner they ought to be, I go and hear the "*Il Don Giovanni*," or "*Tancredi*." I acknowledge that if I dive further than this into harmony, music has less charms, at least for myself.

It is almost necessary to make an effort to be incorrect in writing a phrase of melody; nothing, on the contrary, is so easy as to commit errors in noting down six bars of harmony.

Science is necessary for the composition of harmony; a fatal necessity, which has furnished a pretext for mathematicians and pedants of every description to intrude with daring indifference where men of genius "fear to tread."

The science of composition, as taught in many schools, is full of rules how to combine a series of harmonies, and write them with certain words according to rules of syntax; as to the proper and natural expression of these words, that is quite another affair.

Rossini, on the contrary, oppressed by the number and vivacity of the sentiments

and shade of feeling that presented themselves to his imagination, has fallen into some venial sins against grammar. He was aware of this. In some of his original scores, he was frequently in the habit of placing a cross (+) at the side, opposite to which he wrote—*Per soddisfazione de' pedanti* (for the satisfaction of pedants). A pupil who has been but six months studying music, would frequently be able to detect these negligences.

Let us just throw a glance upon the present state of the musical grammar. In order for its perfection, it is not sufficient to note down with scrupulous fidelity the usages of some particular nation; a more general study and a more extended experience are necessary for this purpose. Music yet awaits her *Lavoisier*. Gifted with a heart fully sensible of its effects, and with an enthusiasm for the art attempered by coolness and judgment, he will devote many years to experience, and then deduct from his experiments a code of rules for music, combining all the knowledge of past times with that of his contemporaries.

This work will be, in the true sense of the word, practical. At the term *anger*, for instance, he will present us with a great number of airs that appear to him most strikingly expressive of that passion. He will pursue the same method with respect to *jealousy, love—happy and unhappy, revenge, &c.*

Frequently he will show how the accompaniment impresses the imagination with a shade of sentiment, which the voice alone could not sufficiently express; sometimes he will show their particular effect with or without an accompaniment; at others, he will mark the point at which such an accompaniment becomes too complicated.

All these important points, illustrated with care, examined with judgment, and decided by experience, will, it is hoped, lead to the establishment of a true theory, founded on the nature of the human heart, and on the habits and constitution of the ear.

The greater part of the rules that, at this moment, oppress the genius of the musician, resemble the philosophy of Plato or Kant. They in general consist of

certain mathematical reveries, invented with more or less ingenuity, but nearly the whole of which require to be submitted to the crucible of experience.* They are imperious rules, founded upon nothing; consequences not derived from any principle: but the misfortune is, that, like the mandates of tyrants, they are surrounded by formidable names, whose interest it is to support their infallibility. If the deference shown to these rules be called in question, if the right upon which they are grounded be examined with scandalous temerity, how would the vanity and self-importance of a hundred professors be startled and take the alarm.

Do you know what happens to the best and most reasonable among them? They arrive at a certain epoch of their musical career, before they perceive that the edifice they are supporting has no firm foundation. They are filled with alarm; they quit the study of the language of the heart, to per-

* The expression of the great Bacon, "*Humano ingenio, non plumæ addendæ, sed potius plumbum et pondera,*" might also be applied to music.

plex themselves with philosophical discussions. Instead of erecting beautiful columns and elegant porticos, they lose the fair and creative season of youth, and squander their time in grubbing in the earth and rummaging for proper strata to begin upon. When at last they come forth covered with dirt and filth, their heads may be surcharged with mathematical truths, but the happy season of youth has fled, and their hearts are found devoid of all that warmth of sentiment necessary to create such an air as the "*Amor possente nume*" of Armida.

There are certain chords, whose effect is evident, which at once speak for themselves; you have to hear them but once to be convinced of their qualities and power. Let every amateur who has a soul attend to the truth of this observation. The precipice he has to shun, is that impatience which leads men to mistake the romance of the science for its history.

Nothing is so painful as to examine, to doubt, to hesitate, when our pleasures are in question. In proportion as those of music are more delightful and captivating, the less are such prudent doubts attended to. In this situa-

tion of the mind, every brilliant theory is apt to enchant and seduce us.* As with respect to the fancy, so in the theory of the arts, a due restraint is necessary to prevent the wanderings of the mind. If we are determined not to check our pleasures, but to follow the course most agreeable to us, at all events, let us not dogmatize.

The opposite error is that of persons devoid of all enthusiasm. When they go in search of new truths they are apt to stop half way, and unfortunately mistake the difficult for the beautiful. Is not this the point at which one of the happiest geniuses of our age is likely to stop? Since "*Tancredi*," Rossini has become more and more complicated. His orchestra is gradually intruding upon the province of the singers. And yet, after all, his accompaniments, like those of the German school, offend rather in respect to *quantity* than *quality*. They are not without merit in themselves, but they intrench upon the free-

* Such is the history of the youthful German. His mind is all enthusiasm, and advantage is taken of such a moment to make him adopt a species of logic, that has not been proved, and which in many instances is ridiculous.

dom of the singer, and prevent him from indulging in those ornaments which are the inspirations of his genius. It is impossible to have a *Davide* with an instrumental accompaniment after the German manner.

We shall hereafter have occasion to relate some anecdotes relative to the court of Naples, where Rossini was induced to change his style. I do not believe this great artist himself (if, for once in his life, he could be induced to speak seriously on the topic of music,) could give any other reasons than those there adduced. He might perhaps plead in excuse that several of his latter operas were composed for large and noisy theatres. At *San Carlo* and the *Scala* three thousand four hundred persons can be accommodated at their ease. Sometimes, too, he has had to write for voices already on the decline. If, in such a case, he had left the voice uncovered (*scoperto*), unprotected by strong accompaniment, or had composed airs of a flowing or sustained character *(spianati e sostinuti,)* it would have been a subject of apprehension least the faults of the singing should become too conspicuous, and prove fatal at once to the master and the

singer. When, on a certain occasion, at Venice, Rossini was reproached for the absence of his former more measured and expressive melodies, his reply was; "*Dunque non sapete per che cani io scrivo ?* (Dont you know for what dogs I have to write ?) only give me more *Crivellis*, and you should see what I would do." It must be allowed that there is some truth in all this ; concerted pieces must be multiplied in order to produce effect in such immense theatres. "*La Gazza Ladra*," written for the vast interior of the *Scala*, appears to have a *harder* effect than is really the case, when presented in a smaller theatre, and especially when performed by a band that cannot be brought to pay due attention to the shades of the composition, and mistake *piano* and *piano assai* for signs of feebleness.

It was at Como, in the summer of this year, (1814,) that I heard for the first time Rossini's "*Demetrio e Polibio*," the first opera that proceeded from his pen. It is said to have been composed as early as 1809, at the request of the old tenor Monbelli, and arranged for the voices of his two daughters, by whom it was performed on the present

occasion. The arrangement of this little company, which was almost entirely composed of a single family, was as follows. Of the two sisters, the elder *Mariana*, now Mad. Lambertini, performed the tenor part habited in man's clothes, while the younger, *Esther*, filled the situation of *prima donna*. Old Monbelli, who was once a celebrated tenor, performed the part of the King, while that of the chief of the conspirators was filled by *Olivieri*, a very serviceable character, who has been long attached to the family. In the theatre he supports second-rate characters, and at home fills the office of cook and *maestro di casa* to the family. I should also mention, that the poetry of the *libretto* was from the pen of Mad. Monbelli.

I was quite charmed with the sweet and simple melodies of this little opera. The cavatina of the tenor, "*Pien di contento il seno*," was full of the most tender and touching expression, and was sung in a very pleasing and unaffected manner by the elder of the sisters. Nothing could better paint the tender affection of a father for his son than the duet between the *soprano* and bass:

"Mio figlio non sei,
Pur figlio ti chiamo."*

But the favorite piece of the opera was the quartetto—"*Donami, omai Siveno.*" After an interval of nine years, during which, for the want of something better to do, I have heard a great quantity of music, I should have no hesitation in saying, that this quartetto is the masterpiece of Rossini. Nothing could be superior to it, and, if Rossini had written nothing else, his name would have been mentioned with those of Mozart and Cimarosa. There is a grace and a lightness of touch about it, which painters call *fait avec rien*, which, in my opinion, has not its equal in the works of any composer.

I still remember the lively impression it created. It was not only encored, but, according to an ancient usage at Como, was called for a third time, when a friend of the family came forward and declared that the ladies had been lately much indisposed, and if the encore of this quartetto was insisted on, it would perhaps disable them from

* Though thou no longer art my son,
I call thee by that tender name.

doing justice to the remainder of the opera. —"But is there any other piece so strong?" —"Certainly," replied the gentleman, "the duet '*Questo cor ti giura amore*,' and two or three other pieces." This assurance had its desired effect, and the enthusiasm of the *parterre* of Como was for a moment pacified. The promised duet called forth scarcely less applause than the former piece; and with justice too, for it was full of beauty and tenderness; it was a picture of love, containing more grace, and less of the doleful, than we are usually accustomed to.

The melodies of this opera were the first flowers of Rossini's imagination; they breathe all the freshness of the morning of life, and their charm is heightened by the grace and modesty of the accompaniments.

CHAP. VIII.

Rossini at Milan continued—"Il Turco in Italia"—*Anecdote of the* Buffa *Paccini*—*Galli.*

Unsuccessful in "*Aureliano in Palmira,*" which Rossini had composed for the carnival season, he made another effort in the autumn of the same year (1814,) and produced the "*Turco in Italia,*" which was considered as a kind of sequel to the "*Italiana in Algeri.*" Galli, the celebrated bass, who had so ably supported the part of the Bey in the *Italiana,* performed the character of the young Turk; who, driven by a tempest, lands in Italy, and falls in love with the first pretty woman that chance throws in his way. Unfortunately the object of his passion has not only a husband *(Don Geronio,)* but a *cavaliere servante (Don Narciso),* who is no way disposed to give place to a Turk. *Donna Fiorilla,* a gay coquet, who is delighted with the handsome stranger, and eagerly avails herself of this opportunity of

tormenting her jealous husband, a man greatly disproportioned to her in age.*

The opening cavatina of Don Geronio is gay and lively in the extreme:

"Vado in traccia d'una zingara,
Che mi sappia astrologar;
Che mi dica, in confidenza,
Se coll tempo e la pazienza,
Il cervello di mia moglie
Potrò giungere a sanar.†"

This charming cavatina is quite in the taste and manner of Cimarosa. The part of Don Geronio is one of those on which the celebrated *buffo* Paccini founded his reputation. Almost every evening he sang the above air in a manner altogether different; sometimes he was the fond husband, driven to despair by the follies of his wife; at

* This opera being so well known among us from the admirable acting of M. and Madame de Begnis, any long critique upon it is rendered unnecessary.

† I go to seek some gipsey dame,
Whose business is to read the stars;
And who, in confidence, may say
If time and patience can avail
To cure my wife's distracted brain.

others a philosopher, who was the first to laugh at the extravagances of his better half. At the fourth or fifth representation, this performer hazarded a piece of ridicule, which is so contrary to the gravity of our manners that it will scarcely be credited. You must know that this evening all the world was busied about the unfortunate event that had happened to the poor Duke of . . . . ., and which, in quality of an injured husband, he did not bear with the most stoical fortitude. The particulars of this unfortunate event, which he had discovered only that very day, furnished a topic of conversation to the whole of the boxes. Paccini, piqued at seeing no attention paid to him, and aware of the circumstances that were whispered in every part of the house, began to imitate the well known gestures and despair of the unfortunate husband. This reprehensible piece of impertinence produced a magical effect. Every eye was turned toward the performer, and when he produced a handkerchief similar to that which the poor Duke incessantly twirled about in his hand, when speaking of his lamentable occurrence, the portrait was

at once recognized, and followed by a burst of malicious applause. But how give an idea of the general feeling, when, at this very instant, the unfortunate individual himself entered a friend's box, which was but a little above the pit. The public rose *en masse* to enjoy the spectacle. Not only was the unfortunate husband not aware of the effect his presence produced, but scarcely had he taken his seat, when he drew out his handkerchief, and by his piteous gestures, was evidently detailing the affair to his friend. One ought to be well acquainted with Italy, and with the keen curiosity that exists with regard to the scandalous chronicle of the day, to form any idea of the burst of convulsive laughter that echoed from every part of the house, at sight of the unconscious husband in his box, and Paccini on the stage, with his eyes fixed upon him during the whole of the cavatina, which had been encored, copying his slightest gestures, and caricaturing them in the most grotesque manner conceivable. The orchestra forgot to accompany, the police forgot to put an end to the scandal. Happily some good-natured friend entered the Duke's box, and

by some lucky pretence adroitly drew him from the public gaze.

Paccini was *not* publicly horse-whipped on quitting the theatre.

The splendid voice of Galli was shown to great advantage in the salutation which he addresses to Italy on his first landing :

> "Bell' Italia! al fin ti miro,
> Vi saluto amiche sponde."*

The author of the *Libretto* intended these words as an allusion to Galli himself, who is a great favorite at Milan, and appeared that evening for the first time after his return from Barcelona. The roll of his voice re-echoed like thunder through the immense interior of the scala; but it was thought that Rossini, who presided at the piano, had not done sufficient justice to these words. Incessant cries resounded of *bravo Galli!* but not a single *bravo Maestro!* for, as we have before observed, on the first representations of an opera, the applauses bestowed on the singers and the master are things perfectly distinct. Trifling as

* Fair Italy! I view thee once again,
And hail with joy thy friendly strand once more.

this circumstance may appear, it had a decided influence upon the fate of the opera, for although some of the pieces, particularly the piquant duet, "*E'un bel uso di Turchia,*" and the celebrated quintetto, "*Oh! guardate, che accidente,*" met with much applause, yet the opera, upon the whole, was coolly received. The national pride was wounded. They declared that Rossini had copied himself. He might take this liberty with little towns; but for the *Scala*,—the first theatre in the world! repeated the Milanese with pecular emphasis,—he must take pains to produce something new. That the fate of this opera was determined by some local circumstances, is evident from the fact, that four years after, the "*Turco di Italia,*" was reproduced in Milan, and received with the greatest enthusiasm.

CHAP. IX.

Rossini accepts an Engagement at Naples—Anecdotes of M. Barbaja—King Ferdinand—Signora Colbran—Loses her Voice in 1816—"L'Elisabetta, Regina d'Ingliterra"—*Signora Colbran's Powers in this Character — Rossini's Indolence — Hack Overture.*

The glory of Rossini had now reached Naples, where the astonishment was that there could be any great composer who was not a Neapolitan. The director of the theatre at Naples was a M. Barbaja, formerly of Milan, who, from being a waiter at a coffee house, had, by good luck at play, and above all by the lucrative situation of manager of a faro-bank, acquired a fortune of several millions of francs. Trained up to business at Milan, in the midst of French *fournisseurs*, who, in army contracts, made and dissipated a fortune every six months, he could not fail of acquiring a certain tact, which was afterwards very useful to him. He had sufficient address to ingratiate himself into

regal favour, and to obtain the post of director of the theatre *San-Carlo*, as well as that of *Del Fondo*. He had sufficient foresight to see that, from the manner the reputation of Rossini was gaining ground in the world, this young composer, good or bad, right or wrong, would become the popular composer of the day. He therefore set off post, to go and find him out at Bologna. Rossini, accustomed to have to deal with poor devils of *impressarj*, who were ever on the verge of bankruptcy, was astonished at a visit from a *millionaire*, who would probably find it unworthy of his dignity to haggle about a few dozen sequins. An engagement was offered, and accepted on the spot. Afterwards, on his arrival at Naples, Rossini signed a *scrittura* for several years. He engaged to compose two new operas every year; and was moreover to arrange the music of all the operas M. Barbaja should think proper to produce either at *San-Carlo*, or the secondary theatre of *Del Fondo*. In consideration of this, he was to receive 12,000 francs per annum, as well as an interest in a bank for play, which was farmed out by M. Barbaja, and

which brought in the composer some thirty or forty louis more yearly.

The musical direction of these two theatres, which Rossini had undertaken without giving it a moment's reflection, was an immense task, a Herculean labour: incredible was the quantity of music he was obliged to transpose and arrange, according to the compass of the voice of the different *donnas*, or according to the interest or caprice of their various patrons and protectors. This would have been sufficient to overwhelm a man of tender nerves or sombre habits; Mozart would have sunk under it. The gay and daring character of Rossini brought him through every obstacle, every snare that the envious laid to entrap him. All he saw in an enemy was a butt for satire and ridicule, in which he is a most perfect adept.

Rossini entered with a light heart upon the heavy duties that had devolved upon him, and, like the *Figaro* of his own *Barbière*, undertook a thousand commissions that poured in upon him from every side. He got through them all with a smile,

and a ready joke upon all who came in his way. This drew down upon him a host of enemies, the most sworn among whom, in latter years, has been M. Barbaja himself, whom he treated so unceremoniously as to marry his mistress. His engagement at Naples did not conclude till 1822, and has had a most decided influence upon his talents, his happiness, and the economy of his whole life.

Always happy, Rossini, towards the close of 1815, made his *debût* at Naples in the most brilliant manner, with the serious opera of "*Elisabetta, regina d'Inglitera.*"

But, in order to account for the success of our young composer, as well as for the mortifications which he was doomed to endure after his arrival at Naples, we must for a moment retrace our steps.

The personage possessing the highest influence at Naples, is a great sportsman, a great player at foot-ball, an indefatigable horseman; he is *un homme tout physique*,—a man made up of physical qualities. He possesses but one sentiment, and it is more than probable that that sentiment itself is connected with these physical habits, and

that is the love of hardy enterprise. As for the rest, he is a being without a heart, either for good or evil; a being totally devoid of all moral sensibility of every kind, as it becomes a true sportsman to be. He has been called avaricious; this is an exaggeration: he cannot bear to transfer a guinea from one hand to another, but he will sign as many bonds upon his treasury as you please.

King Ferdinand had languished nine years in Sicily, imprisoned, as it were, in the midst of persons who were constantly annoying him with the terms,—parliament, finances, balance of power, and other outlandish words, which he could not comprehend, and indeed had no wish so to do. He arrives at Naples, and lo! one of the finest objects of his beloved city, that which of all others claimed the deepest regret during his long absence,—the magnificent theatre of *San-Carlo*, is destroyed by fire in a single night.

It is said that the monarch felt this blow more severely than the loss of a kingdom, or at least of a dozen battles. In the midst of his despair, a man presents him-

self before him, who says; "Sire, this immense theatre which the flames have devoured, I engage to rebuild in nine months, and more beautiful than it was yesterday." M. Barbaja kept his word. On entering the new *San-Carlo*, 12th January, 1817, the King of Naples, for the first time these twelve years, felt himself really a King. From this moment, M. Barbaja was the first man in the kingdom. This first man of the kingdom, this director of theatres, and speculator in banks for play, was also the protector of the Signora Colbran, his first singer, who made a fool of him all day long, and of course held him entirely under her control. Signora Colbran, now Madame Rossini, was, from 1806 to 1815, one of the first singers of Europe. But voices, like other things, are not made to last for ever; and accordingly, in 1815, it began to lose its power; or, if we may venture to apply to her a term that is applied to vulgar singers, she began to *sing false*. From 1816 to 1822, Signora Colbran usually sung a note too high, or a note too low; such singing would anywhere else have been called *execrable;* but it was not proper to say so at

Naples. In spite of this little inconvenience, Signora Colbran did not the less continue to be the first singer of the theatre *San-Carlo,* and was constantly applauded. Surely this may be reckoned as one of the most flattering triumphs of despotism. If there is one feeling more predominant than another among the Neapolitan people, it doubtless is that of music. Well, during five little years, from 1816 to 1822, this people, all fire, have been mortified, in a manner the most galling, and that in the dearest of their pleasures. M. Barbaja was led by his mistress, who protected Rossini; he paid to the monarch, *questo che bisognava pagare,** (such is the Neapolitan phrase); he was patronized by this prince, and it was necessary to support the part of his mistress.

Twenty times have I been at *San-Carlo*; Signora Colbran began an air; she sung so miserably out of tune, that it was impossible to endure it. I saw my neighbours desert the pit; their nerves were horrified, but they did not utter a word. Let it be denied, after this, that terror is the principle of despotic government, and that this principle can work

* What it was necessary to pay.

miracles. To obtain silence from a Neapolitan in his wrath!—I followed the example of my neighbours; we went and took a turn round *Largo di Castello*, and returned at the end of about twenty minutes, to see if we could hit upon some duet or concerted piece, in which the ill-omened protegée of M. Barbaja might not have to entertain us with the ruins of her splendid voice. During the short-lived constitutional government of 1821, Signora Colbran never ventured to make her appearance, unless preceded by a thousand humble apologies. The public, by way of a bit of spite, and in order to annoy their former annoyer, cried up the reputation of a certain Mademoiselle Chaumel, whose name was *Italianized* into *Comelli*, and who was known to be the rival of Colbran in more respects than one.

But at the time Rossini first arrived at Naples, and gave his "*Elisabetta*," things had not come to this pass. The public were then very far from disliking Signora Colbran; at no period, perhaps, was this celebrated singer so handsome. Her beauty was of the most imposing kind; strong features, which, in the scene, produce a most powerful effect, a magnificent figure,

an eye of fire *a la circassienne*, a profusion of raven locks; in fine, she is formed by nature for tragedy. This woman, who, off the stage, has all the dignity of a *marchande des modes*, the moment she enters the scene, with her brow encircled with the diadem, inspires an involuntary respect, even in those who have just quitted her in the tiring-room.

The first duet, between *Leicester* and his young spouse, is very striking and original. The great reputation acquired by Rossini in the north of Italy, had predisposed the Neapolitan public to judge him with severity: it may be said that this first duet, "*Incauta! che festi?*" decided the success both of the opera and the *maestro*.

Norfolk, jealous of the high degree of favour which *Leicester* had obtained with the queen, reveals to her the secret of his marriage. He tells her that her favourite, who has just returned victorious from the war in Scotland, and whose triumphal arrival forms the commencement of the first act, has brought with him his young wife, who has been introduced as one of the hostages, and admitted into the number of the queen's pages. The conflict of pride and

affection in the heart of Elizabeth at hearing this, is admirably painted in the music, and was received with rapturous applause.

The queen, transported out of herself, orders the grand marshal of her court to assemble her guards, and prepare for the prompt execution of her orders, whatever they may be. She commands Leicester, together with the hostages from Scotland, to be brought before her. After these rapid orders, delivered in a few emphatic words, Elizabeth remains alone. It must be acknowledged that there was something very august in the manner of Signora Colbran at this moment. She paced the scene with a haughty yet firm step, and the expression of her eye was that of an offended queen, who was on the point of condemning to death her perfidious rival.

At length Leicester appears, and at the same moment the pages of the queen. The eye of Elizabeth scans them rapidly over, to discover the object of her hatred, who is at once betrayed by the agitation of her manner. At length the magnificent finale of the first act commences, which was followed by long and repeated plaudits.

The second act opens with a striking scene, between the haughty *Elizabeth* and the trembling *Matilda*. The accompanied recitative, in which the indignant queen addresses her rival, is magnificent, and produced a powerful impression.

Nothing but an actual view of Signora Colbran in this scene, could give an adequate idea of the enthusiasm with which she was received. An Englishman, one of the rivals of Barbaja, had sent to England for accurate designs of the costume of Elizabeth, which was scrupulously adhered to. This gorgeous apparel of the sixteenth century was admirably adapted to Colbran's fine figure and striking features. The spectators were acquainted with this anecdote, and the truth of the costume, as well as the beauty of the scenery, tended strongly to recal the image of a memorable epoch.

There was nothing affected or theatrical in the acting of Signora Colbran. Her power and superiority were marked in the strong expression of her dark Spanish eye, and the dignified energy of her action. She had the look of a queen, whose fury was only restrained by a sense of pride: she had

the air of a sovereign, who had long been accustomed to have her slightest wish obeyed; nay, almost anticipated.

The scene in which this singer showed herself so great a tragedian, terminates in the duet between *Elizabeth* and *Matilda*, "*Pensa, che sol per poco,*" which is immediately changed into a magnificent terzetto, by the arrival of *Leicester*.

It is said that Rossini himself conceived this idea of the arrival of *Leicester*, in the midst of the duet between two women, the one of whom can scarcely restrain her bursting fury, while the other, wrought up by the energy of despair, boldly avows the love which marriage has sanctified: it may be safely said, that this is a master-piece of genius.

Leicester is thrown into prison, and condemned to death. Some moments before his execution, *Elizabeth* cannot resist the temptation of a last interview with the man who had awakened feelings of tenderness in a heart devoted to ambition. She appears in the prison where *Leicester* is confined. The traitor *Norfolk* had been there before her, and, on her arrival, conceals himself be-

hind one of the pillars of the prison. The two lovers come to a mutual explanation. They discover the treachery of *Norfolk*, who, finding himself discovered, and despairing of pardon, rushes toward the queen with a poignard in his hand. *Matilda*, who at that moment enters to take a last farewell of her husband, is the means of saving the life of *Elizabeth*.

This brings us to one of the most magnificent finales Rossini ever composed. The exclamation of the queen, "*Bell' alme generose*," excited a general burst of enthusiastic applause.

The evening this opera made its appearance was that of a *gala* at court. The opera was in consequence very splendidly attended, and the whole effect was favourable to the composer. I remarked that in the box of the *Principessa di Belmonte*, near which I sat, there was at first a general disposition to be severe towards a *maestro*, who was born at a distance from Naples, and had acquired his celebrity elsewhere than in the *bel Partenope*. But, as I before observed, her charming duet between *Leicester* (Nozzari,) and his young

wife, disguised as a page (Signora Dardanelli), disarmed all opposition.

It must be allowed that the music of "*Elisabetta*" possesses much more of the magnificent than of the pathetic. It abounds with examples of Rossini's besetting sin; the song is overwhelmed by a deluge of ornaments, and many of the melodies seem rather to have been composed for wind-instrument than for the human voice.

But let us be just to Rossini. This was his first attempt at Naples; he was anxious to succeed, and there was no other way of doing this than by pleasing the *prima donna*, who entirely governed the director Barbaja. But Signora Colbran has no talent for the pathetic: like her person, it is magnificent; she is a queen, she is Elizabeth, but it is Elizabeth issuing her commands from the throne, and not Elizabeth touched with compassion and pardoning with generosity. Even if Rossini had possessed a talent for the pathetic, which I am far from being disposed to grant, he could not have employed it, for the reasons we have just stated. In the air, "*Bell' alme generose*," Rossini has artfully

concentrated all the beauties, of whatever kind, that Signora Colbran could execute. We are presented, as it were, with an inventory of all the capabilities of her fine voice, and of whatever the powers of execution can effect. Flagrant as the absurdity is, yet so superior is the manner in which it is effected, that it requires several representations to convince us how sadly all these prettinesses are misplaced.

Rossini, who is never to be put out of countenance, would say, in reply to our criticism; "Elizabeth is a queen even in pardoning. In a heart so lofty as hers, a pardon, the most generous in appearance, is nothing more, after all, than an act of policy. Where is the woman, queen or no queen, who could pardon the affront of seeing herself preferred to another woman?"

Then all the old dilettanti grew angry; "The whole of your music," cried they, "is defective; there is a total absence of the pathetic. The character of *Matilda* should be tenderness itself, and there is nothing but the beginning of your terzetto—'*Pensa che sol per poco*,' that can make any pretensions to this character; and, after all, this itself is as

simple as a *Notturno*.* Frankly acknowledge that you have sacrificed expression and dramatic effect to the embellishments of Signora Colbran."—"*I have sacrificed them to success!*" would Rossini reply, cutting them short with that fierceness of manner which he can assume to a wonder. The amiable Archbishop of Tarento came to his assistance. "Scipio," said he, "when accused before the people of Rome, made no other answer to his enemies than this—'Romans, it is now such a day ten years ago that I destroyed Carthage; let us go to the Capitol, and return thanks to the immortal gods.'"

The effect produced by "*Elisabetta*" was prodigious. Though greatly inferior to "*Otello*," for example, their are many things in this opera, that have a beauty and freshness about them rarely to be found elsewhere.

I had forgotten to mention the overture. It was favourably received, but an excellent connoisseur who was in the *Principessa di Belmonte's* box, declared, loud enough to be heard, that it was the same as that of "*Au-*

* A name given to certain instrumental pieces, supposed to be particularly calculated for *evening* recreation.

reliano in Palmira," with this only difference, that the harmony was more powerfully enforced. It has since been proved, that his assertion was altogether correct. When, a year after, Rossini went to Rome, and wrote the "*Barbiere di Seviglia,*" his indolence made him bring forward the same overture a third time. Thus it is made to serve the double purpose of expressing the conflict between love and pride in the loftiest minds of whom history has preserved the memory, and the follies of the barber Figaro! Frequently a little change in the *time* is sufficient to impart an air of gaiety to accents of the profoundest melancholy, and *vice versa*. To be satisfied of the truth of this, one has but to sing the celebrated air of Mozart "*Non più andrai farfalone amoroso,*" in a slower movement.

In speaking of the two great Italian theatres, the *Scala* and the *San-Carlo*, it will be seen that I give the preference to the former. Persons who have travelled in Italy, and who, soaring above the merely *useful* and *convenient*, have also a taste for the *beautiful*, will naturally enquire the reason of this. Nothing can be more unjust in

appearance; Naples is the birth-place of the beautiful in song. Milan has been in a great measure spoiled by its vicinity to a people who reason too much about music. Thirty of the first composers in the world were born in the neighbourhood of Vesuvius, while scarcely a single one has appeared in Lombardy. The orchestra of *San-Carlo* is very superior to that of the *Scala*, which follows exactly the same principle in music as the present French school does in painting; all is uniform glare and showiness. Through the mere dread of ridicule, this orchestra finishes by allowing no prominent effects; it resembles those physicians who let their patients die without help for fear of being called *Sangrados*. For fear of not being *sweet* and *harmonious*, or, in other words, for fear of that *ridicule* which, among an *ultra*-civilized people, easily attaches to every strong effort and every attempt at originality, the French painters have come at last to paint every thing *en gris*, not excepting the very verdure, that beautiful robe of nature, herself. It is the same at the *Scala*; the orchestra would think every thing ruined if it played otherwise than *piano*. This is

the very opposite fault to the French orchestra, which prides itself upon being always *forte*, and of setting the singers at defiance; the orchestra of the *Scala* is their most humble servant.

So far all is in favour of Naples; but the absolute monarchy of the house of Austria is an oligarchical monarchy; that is, reasoning, economical, calculating. The grandees of Austria are great amateurs in music; the Austrian princes are personages of merit, and not deficient in science; but they are cautious not to do any thing without having first duly consulted certain venerable seers, without genius, it is true, but at the same time discreet and prudent to a miracle. On the contrary, the despotism of Naples with respect to *San-Carlo* and M. Barbaja, assumed the form of favoritism in its most amusing shape, and accompanied with even more than its usual absurdities. It has sometimes happened that the *San-Carlo* has been shut for a week together through the caprice of M. Barbaja. Instead of a grand ballet and an opera in two acts, he has sometimes given only one act of an opera, in order not to fatigue the nearly-exhausted voice of

Signora Colbran, and a short ballet. Strangers have come to Naples, and staid there two or three months without being able to hear the second act of "*Medea*" or "*Cora*." I had no great difficulty in bearing such a privation, but many of these strangers were Germans, and great sticklers for the music of Mayer. Besides, "*Medea*" and "*Cora*" were all the rage. For two whole months, only the first act was given, and during the two following, only the second, according as it suited either Signora Colbran's voice or her caprice.

It is dangerous to talk of politics at Naples. I was acquainted with the charming family of the Marquis N . . . . ., but, as the politics of the various members of the family were different, a death-like silence prevailed at table, which was only interrupted by observations upon the weather, the last eruption of Vesuvius, or the feast of St. Januarius. I should not forget to mention, that the very theatre, Rossini, and Signora Colbran, had become party affairs, upon which either a total silence must be maintained, or furious discussions were sure to follow; and these are carried to an excess in this land of sensibi-

lity, of which we in more northern latitudes can form but a very faint idea.—"What a charming opera is that *Mosè*!" said the second son, who was a partisan of the king. "Yes," replied the elder, "and charmingly sung too! yesterday evening the Colbran sung only (*non calava*) half a note false!"—A dead silence followed. To speak ill of the Colbran is to speak ill of the king, and the two brothers had made up their minds not to get into a quarrel.

The only means the public have of taking their revenge is this: if, after listening to the first bars of her air, they found she was determined to sing false, they were also determined not to listen. There was no law against this. They drew back into their boxes, and fell into conversation, or filled up the time with coffee and ices.

In 1820, the way to make the Neapolitans happy was, not to give them a Spanish constitution, but to rid them of the Signora Colbran.

Rossini had no wish to enter into all the intrigues of Barbaja. It was soon perceived, that nothing was more foreign to his character than intrigue, and, above all, the spirit

and consequences which it demands; but, when he was called by M. Barbaja to Naples, and became the fond admirer of Signora Colbran, it was difficult for the Neapolitans not to make him feel the effects of their *ennui*. But the hiss that was ever upon their lips, was constantly repressed by the seductive force of his talent. Rossini, on his side, not being able to place any reliance upon the voice of Signora Colbran, took refuge in the harmony of the German school, and departed more and more from *true dramatic expression*. He was continually persecuted by Signora Colbran for airs containing such ornaments as were suited to the state and qualities of her voice.

Thus we see by what a chain of fatal circumstances poor Rossini has been drawn into errors, and betrayed into all the appearances of musical pedantry. It is like a great poet, and a poet of the comic order too, forced to be *learned*, and to display his learning upon grave and solemn subjects.

CHAP. X.

Rossini at Rome — "Torvaldo e Dorliska"— "Il Barbiere di Seviglia"—*Cardinal Gonsalvi.*

After the flattering reception which his "*Elisabetta*" experienced at Naples, Rossini was called to Rome for the Carnival of 1816, where he composed his semi-serious opera, "*Torvaldo e Dorliska,*" for the theatre *Valle,* and his *chef-d'œuvre* the "*Barbiere di Seviglia.*"

The first of these operas was considered as very mediocre, and quickly consigned to the tomb of the Capulets.* There are, however, parts in it of considerable beauty, for instance, the air of Dorliska, "*Ah, Torvaldo! dovesei?*" which is highly expressive of

* For once, Rossini seems to have fallen a victim to the silliness and uniform stupidity of the *libretto,* which is so totally defective of any thing like originality or individuality of character in the personages, that it would appear to be a translation of some second-rate melo-drama of one of our second-rate theatres.

passion, and when sung in a bold and energetic style, cannot fail of producing a powerful effect.*

The sequel to this, which is a *terzetto* between the tyrant, the lover, and the *buffa* porter, "*Ah! qual raggio di Speranza!*" would have been sufficient to give celebrity to an ordinary master, but it added nothing to that of Rossini; for, when a composer has once produced something really great, he must never be feeble afterwards. This would be like a common romance from the pen of Sir Walter Scott, who may be considered as the rival of the *maestro* of Pesaro, in fecundity of genius and universal celebrity. Most assuredly, if some obscure author had written the *Pirate* and the *Monastery*, they would at once have raised him above the common ranks of literature. What distinguishes this great master is, the boldness of his traits, his negligence of details, and the grandeur of his touch; he knows the happy art of economizing

* This air is known to the British public, from the admirable manner in which it was given at several of our Concerts last season, by Madame Camporese.

attention in order to launch it out at once upon something important; these are likewise the points in which Rossini excels.

The tyrant sings a superb *agitato*: this is the true style adapted to a powerful bass. To such of my readers as are not acquainted with this air, it may be satisfactory to know that it now forms a part of the celebrated duet in the second act of Othello, "*Non m'inganno, al mio rivale.*"

Rossini found the *impressario* of the theatre *Argentina*, tormented by the police, who refused all the *libretti*, (words of the opera,) under pretext of their containing certain political allusions. Indeed, among a people that is lively and discontented, every thing becomes an allusion. In a moment of disappointment and ill-humour, the *impressario* proposed to the head of the police, "*Il Barbiere di Seviglia*," an excellent *libretto*, but which had already been set to music by Paisiello. The government, wearied out at length with prosing about decency and morals, consented. Rossini, who is intellectual enough to be modest when put in competition with real merit, was not a little embarrassed by this choice. He

instantly wrote to Paisiello, who was at Naples, to acquaint him with the circumstance. The old *maestro,* who was not devoid of a mixture of *gasconism,* and who had been not a little piqued at the success of "*Elisabetta,*" replied very drily, that he was perfectly content with the choice the Roman police had made, and that he had no doubt as to the result.

Rossini wrote a very modest preface to the *libretto,* shewed Paisiello's letter to all the *dilettanti* of Rome, and immediately set about the composition, which was finished in the short space of thirteen days. It was produced on the 26th December, 1816, on the first day of the Carnival. Having been unsuccessful in his first essay for the Roman theatre, Rossini felt considerable anxiety on this occasion; he has been heard to say, that, on taking his seat at the piano, his heart throbbed with a violence unknown to him before.

The Romans seemed to consider the commencement of the opera as very tiresome, and greatly inferior to that of Paisiello. They sought in vain for that graceful and inimitable *naïveté,* that style in which is

the very model of simplicity. The first air of *Rosina,* "*Io sono docile,*" appeared entirely out of character. They charged Rossini with having substituted the pertness of a virago, for the complainings of a gentle and love-sick girl. The duet between *Rosina* and *Figaro,* which possesses an admirable lightness, and is the triumph of Rossini's style, drew forth the first applause, and began to cheer the spirits of the disheartened composer. The air "*La Calunnia*" was pronounced to be magnificent and original. The Romans were not well acquainted with Mozart in 1816, or they would have discovered that it was a close imitation of his style and manner, nay, if we may believe some critics, that it was copied from the air "*La vendetta,*" in the "*Nozze di Figaro,*" and other parts of the same illustrious author. This may be the case; but I would also add, that it was thus Raphael copied Michael Angelo's magnificent *fresco* of the prophet Isaiah, in the church of Santo Agostino, at Rome.

After the air of "*Basilio,*" a still stronger want was felt of the native grace and expression of Paisiello. At length, wearied

by the common things at the commencement of the second act, and shocked at what they considered a total absence of expression, the audience would hear no more, and the curtain fell. But, proud as they were of their musical knowledge, the Roman public found, that, by this act of haughtiness and want of dispassionate feeling, they had, as is often the case, been guilty of an act of folly. The matter was canvassed over at leisure, and in their cooler moments they began to see, that if Rossini did not possess some of the merits of Paisiello, that at least he had not that languor of style, which so often proves fatal to works of merit; that, if his airs had not all the finish of the old master, at least they were not separated from each other by such an eternal interval of wearisome recitative; like those little spots of refreshing verdure found amidst the wilderness of sand. On the second night of representation it was extolled to the clouds.

The overture gave general satisfaction: it was thought to be admirably expressive of the scolding ill-nature of the old and amorous guardian, and the complaining of the impatient ward. The little terzetto

"*zitti, zitti, piano, piano,*" was encored with enthusiasm.

However, the Roman critics thought they discovered that Rossini had not only been inferior to himself, but to the generality of composers, in the expression of impassioned tenderness. "The music, (said they,) is gay, lively, and spirited, but it is not adapted to the subject. What! when *Rosina* finds in Count *Almaviva* a faithful lover, instead of a heartless seducer, as she had been led to suppose, shall she, in place of giving vent to a gush of extatic feeling, bewilder her voice, her lover, and the audience, with a series of roulades and cadences!" And yet these insignificant and ill-placed embellishments, have been applauded to the very echo in other capitals.

Music, and particularly that of the dramatic kind, has made a considerable progress since the time of Paisiello. The long and wearisome recitative has been discarded, concerted pieces are more frequently introduced, which, by their vivacity, and the strong stimulant of the *crescendo*, keep *ennui* at a distance, and allow the yawner no apology. It was the opinion at Rome,

that, had Cimarosa composed the music of the "*Barbiere,*" it might have been less animated and less brilliant, but would have been more comic, and infinitely more tender and impassioned.

We will take a rapid view of the prominent parts of this favorite opera.

The cavatina of *Figaro,* "*Largo al factotum,*" is a master-piece of the gay and comic style; in every country where it has been heard, there has been but one opinion on the subject. The little duet "*All' idea di quel metallo,*" is light and full of grace and naïveté. Of the air of *Rosina,* we have already seen the opinion entertained by the Roman critics; and yet it might be remarked, that this air of assurance in a young ward, who is persecuted with the addresses of an old guardian, is not so much out of character, and serves to impress us with a conviction that she will have the laudible resolution of disappointing his wishes at last.

The duet "*Dunque io son . . . tu non m'inganni?*" is, in all respects, a most finished composition, and pregnant with character and expression. The phrase "*Lo*

sapea prima di te," (I knew it even before yourself,) might seem out of character to the more sedate inhabitants of the north of the Alps. I cannot help saying, that Rossini seems very gratuitously to have sacrificed a trait in the character of *Rosina,* that would have tended, very materially, to heighten its charm. Love, even the most impassioned, cannot exist without modesty; to deprive it of this feeling, is to fall into the error of the gross and the sensual. No doubt Rossini might plead a thousand precedents, in his favour, but it is not thus I should explain this want of delicacy in the air of *Rosina.* During the time Rossini was composing this opera at Rome, he was known to have mingled in a variety of adventures, which were more in the style of "*Don Juan,*" than of "*Cœlebs in search of a wife.*" The character of the women by whom his society was courted, and whom he loved *en passant,* would naturally give a tinge to the creatures of his imagination. Scandal has said—but who will give credit to her malignity?—that Rossini was in the habit of singing over the airs of this opera, for the critical opinion of his fair friends,

and that in their eyes, timidity and tenderness would have passed for the silliness *di un colegiale* (of a *green-horn.)*

The misfortune of Rossini is, that he treats the passion of love as a mere affair of gallantry. Hence in those parts of the "*Barbiere*" where he ought to be tender, he becomes elegant and *recherchè*. He never rises above the temperate degree. This manner is very well in the usages of life, but it will not do where glory is in question. I find much more energy and latitude of feeling in the first works of Rossini; compare the "*Pietra del Paragone,*" "*Demetrio e Polibio,*" and "*Aureliano in Palmira,*" with the opera before us. I suspect that, at this period, he had become somewhat incredulous in love: this is rather extraordinary philosophy in a young man of twenty: all the better, it may be said, for his peace of mind; but all the worse for his music. Raphael, Canova, and a hundred other geniusses, had the folly to fall in love.

Nothing can be more original and piquant than the gallantry in the passage; "*Sol due righe di biglietto.*" It is evident, that, however pleasing the idea Rossini hits upon, he is always fearful

of pursuing it, lest he should become tedious. Compare the above duet with that of Farinelli, in the "*Matrimonio secreto*," and you will find an abundance of phrases in the latter that Rossini would have rejected as being too long.

There is a just and lively expression of happiness in the "*Fortunati i affetti miei*," though it must be confessed that the love described is rather that of a lively widow of five-and-twenty than of a girl of eighteen. Upon the whole, there are few, even of his tragic duets, in which Rossini has attained so high a degree of power and originality. Had he, like his colleague M. Mayerber, been born with fifty thousand livres a year, I can easily imagine that his genius would have declared for the *opera buffa*. But it was necessary to live; he found Signora Colbran, who only sings in the *opera seria*, all-powerful at Naples. Add to this, that the policy of Italy, as ridiculous in detail as it is impotent in great things, has so ordered it that the prices of admission to the *opera seria*, are three times as high as to the *opera buffa*; from which it may be gathered, that fools of every country, literary or not,

imagine that the comic style is the easiest. Do such people judge from themselves, and from the consciousness they feel of the part they are themselves playing? Such was the bright idea of the system of policy established forty years since by Leopold, Grand Duke of Tuscany, which deprived Italy of that delightful kind of indigenous literature, the "*Comedia dell' arte,*" which was played impromptu, and which Goldoni thought he could supersede by his insipid dialogue. The small remains of true comedy still existing in Italy are to be found among the *marrionetti,* so admirable in Genoa, Rome, and Milan: the pieces given in this manner, as being impromptu, escape the censure, and are founded upon the inspiration of the moment, and the passing interests of the day. Even more enlightened men give into the follies of this system; and it would scarcely be believed, that Cardinal Gonzalvi, an able politician, and who had formerly the courage to be the intimate friend of Cimarosa,*

* The Cardinal is himself a great *dilettante.* In 1806, he came in person to the theatre, to point out to the singers, the true movement of certain pieces of Cimarosa. He was obliged to employ infi-

can pass three whole hours in castigating the miserable *libretto* of an *opera buffa*. How delicate this tenderness for the Roman morals, this solicitude to preserve them pure and spotless! And are these the people that are in danger of being corrupted by the *libretto* of an opera? Good heavens! Raise four additional companies of *gendarmes;* hang every year some dozen of prevaricating judges; repress public peculation; scout corruption from the seats of justice: and then talk of purity and morals. Some of

nite address to bring the late Pope, to consent that the theatres should be opened. His Holiness said, with tears in his eyes: "This is the only thing in which the Cardinal has been in error."

Gonzalvi caused the bust of his favourite, Cimarosa, to be made for him by Canova. It was placed, in 1816, in the Pantheon, by the side of the bust and tomb of Raphael. But the Cardinal, yielding more and more to the ultra party, at length consented that the bust of his friend should be exiled to the capitol, and take its place amidst a parcel of antique heads. At the Pantheon it was a monument, and made its due impression on all who are born for the arts; in the capitol, it is a mere object of curiosity. To what cause is this feeling against the author of the "*Matrimonio secreto*" to be attributed? Cimarosa had manifested a partiality for the politics that prevailed in Naples, in the year 1800!

the most intrepid officers in Napoleon's service were natives of Rome—Julius II. found means of raising an army there—all the virtues of their great progenitors are not extinct: but two ages of the despotism of Napoleon would, perhaps, be scarcely sufficient to establish there, the decent morals of a second-rate English town; Nottingham or Norwich, for example. But we are digressing; let us return to the "*Barbiere.*"

The entrance of Count Almaviva, disguised as a soldier, and the commencement of the finale of the first act, are models of lightness, spirit, and expression. There is a delightful contrast between the stupid vanity of *Bartolo,* who repeats three times, with peculiar emphasis, "*Dottor Bartolo,*" and the exclamation of the Count aside, "*Ah! venisse il caro oggetto!*" The effect of the chorus, "*La forza! aprite quà,*" is picturesque and striking. The moment of silence and repose that follows is introduced with great judgment; the ear feels, after the deluge of notes that has preceded it, the want of it in the most sensible manner.

The grand quintetto in the second act

at the arrival and sending away of *Basilio*, is full of beauty in its kind. The same subject in the hands of Paisiello, is a masterpiece of grace and simplicity; and Rossini knew well in what repute it stood throughout the whole of Italy. At the last representation of the "*Barbiere*" of Paisiello, at the *Scala* in 1814, this piece was enthusiastically applauded, but it was the only one. I would recommend amateurs to sing the two pieces over the same evening; in so doing, they will learn more musical truths in one half hour, than I could preach to them in twenty chapters. The old master places, in a new and comic light, the unanimity of the counsel given to *Basilio*, "*Andate al letto*," and it is this which provokes a laugh as delicious and as inextinguishable as that of Homer's Synod of the Gods. There is great dramatic truth in Rossini's "*Ehi, dottore, una parola*,"—"*Siete giallo come un morto*,"—"*Questa è febre scarlatina*,"—but, after all, he must on this occasion yield the palm to the ancient master.

There is great spirit in the air of the old gouvernante Berta, "*Il vecchio cerca*

moglie," but unfortunately we generally hear it murdered by some worse than second-rate singer. To know the point and comic effect it was intended to produce, we ought to hear it sung by Rossini himself, which he is fond of doing, and which is really a treat. Such an air as this, which fills only a second-rate part in Rossini's opera, would be sufficient to make the fortune of one of Morlachi's compositions, or indeed, of any one of our composer's numerous rivals.

Nothing can be more light, airy, and graceful, than the *terzetto,* "*Zitte, zitte, piano, piano,*" which in all the theatres of Europe is sure of an encore. Its only fault is that it is misplaced, by obliging the personages of the piece to lose an infinite deal of time at a moment when they ought only to think of making their escape,—but who ever thinks of noticing such a defect?

CHAP. VI.

Rossini returns to Naples—San-Carlo—Signora Colbran—L'Otello—The jettatura *at Naples—Anecdote of Stradella.*

Elevated by the success he had obtained at Rome, Rossini returned to Naples in the spring of 1816, and recommenced his labours with fresh spirit.

San-Carlo, at this period, presented one of the most striking spectacles that the most enthusiastic and most fastidious amateur could desire. Signora Colbran was seconded by the two Davides, and by Nozzari, Garcia, and Siboni. Colbran sung, in the same year, in the "*Elizabetta*" and "*Otello*" of Rossini; the "*Gabriella, de Vergy*," of Caraffa; and in the "*Cora*" and "*Medea*," of Mayer; and all this with great sublimity of manner, and incredible powers of voice. But this splendid period was destined to be of short duration. After this year, the voice of Signora Colbran began to lose its power, and it was considered a singular piece of good fortune to hear her sing an air in tune. The mere

dread of being always upon the brink of a false note, was sufficient to destroy the charm: in order fully to enjoy the beauty of music, one must not be reduced to the necessity of criticising.

The next subject proposed to Rossini was the story of Othello; but he had the good taste to object to the Italian imitation, or rather caricature, of Shakspeare. The author, the Marquese di Berio, is a man of consideration in Naples, and his *libretto* was at last adopted. The Italians have a very respectable translation of Shakspeare, by Fetoni, and Rossini has been heard to say,that, before sitting down to compose to the flat and insipid rhapsody of the Marquis, he took care to imbibe inspiration from the purer source of Fetoni's version. However, this inspiration did not seem to commence with the overture, which is by far too gay, and altogether discordant with the deep tragic interest, to which it ought to serve as a prologue.

The *entrata* of '*Othello*' is splendid. It is a moment of interest, and required all the power of Rossini: it is animated with all the fire of his happiest moments, but

would produce a more decided effect, had the music by which it is preceded been of a more simple character, and allowed to stand forward in bolder relief. Indeed, this is the great fault of the music of the German school.

The duet between *Rodrigo* and *Othello*, "*E qual diritto mai*" is beyond all praise; it has all the nerve and vigour of Mozart; it is at the same time the most perfect transcript of the language of passion, and in the highest degree dramatic in its effect.

All the world knows the "*Impia ti maledico!*" This is one of the strongest effects that music is capable of producing; but then the passage is stolen from the "*Adelina*" of Generali. The chorus "*Ah, che giorno d'orror!*" is full of power, and admirably in unison with the scene that precedes it.

The finale of the first act is magnificent in the extreme. The expression of the words "*Smanio, diliro e tremo*" is perfect. The trio is said by connoiseurs to awaken too many reminiscences of a similar movement in "*Il Don Giovanni*;" the part for the clarinet is the same. The accompani-

ment of the orchestra, during the time *Othello* is reading the fatal billet, is said to be the fragment of a symphony of Haydn, in E flat.

In the grand duet between *Othello* and *Iago*, in the second act, beginning with the words "*Non m'inganno, al mio rivale*," the cruel author of the "*libretto*," has, at last, allowed us to enjoy one of the situations of Shakspeare. We see the art of *Iago* dragging the unfortunate *Othello* towards the precipice. The music is full of energy and expression, and not unworthy of the dramatic situation of the great poet himself. Indeed, the whole story increases in interest towards the conclusion of the second act. The sorrows of the unhappy *Desdemona*, are managed with considerable address. She appears in her chamber at an advanced hour of the night, and reveals to her confidante the grief and sombre presentiments with which the news of the banishment of *Othello*, overwhelm her heart. At this moment the voice of a gondolier is heard on the *Laguna*, singing these verses of Dante :

" Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria."*

At hearing these words, the unhappy *Desdemona* flies towards the window, exclaiming, "Who art thou that singest thus? How dost thou remind me of my unhappy lot!" It is then that her friend makes this touching reply:

" E il gondoliere, che cantando inganna
Il cammin sulla placida laguna,
Pensando ai figli, mentre il ciel s'imbruna."†

There is something very happy in the accompanied recitative in which these words are given. The song of the gondolier recalls to the memory of the young Venetian, the fate of a faithful slave, who had been the companion of her infancy, but died far from her country. *Desdemona* thus apostrophises her:

* " There is no bitterer grief
Than in hours of deep distress,
To recal past happiness."

† " It is the gondolier, who singing thus,
Beguiles his way upon the placid lake,
Musing the while upon his little ones,
As falls the dusky night."

" Infelice ancor fosti
Al par di me; ma or tu riposi in pace." *

In pacing her chamber, the eye of *Desdemona* falls upon her harp; she flies towards it, and chaunts to it a romance, composed to the memory of the African slave, her former nurse. As we have been, though not without justice, severe on the *libretto* of the good Marquese di Berio, it is but just to quote this romance, as a fair specimen of his poetical talents:

" Assisa a piè d'un salice,
Immersa nel dolore,
Gemea trafitta Isaura
Dal più crudele amore;
L'aura fra i rami flebile
Ne repeteva il suon.

I ruscelletti limpidi
A caldi suoi sospiri,
Il mormorio mesceano
De' lor diversi giri;
L'aura fra i rami flebile
Ne ripeteva il suon.

Salce, d'amor delizia!
Ombra pietosa appresta,

---

* " Thou too wert, like myself, unhappy once;
But now thou dost repose in peace."

Di miei sciagure immemore
All'urna mia funesta ;
Ne più repeta l'aura
De'miei lamenti il suon.

Ma, stanca alfin di spargere
Mesti sospiri e piante,
Morì, l'afflitta vergine,
Ahi ! di quel salce accanto !
Morì !—Ahimè, che il pianto
Prosequir non mi fa !"*

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* "Beneath a drooping willow lay
The sad Isaura wailing,
And pour'd, to cruel love a prey,
Her sorrows unavailing ;
Sighing, the moaning boughs among,
The breeze return'd her plaintive song

The streamlet, as it glided by,
Its soften'd murmurs blending,
Commingled with each burning sigh,
She from her breast was sending ;
Sighing the moaning boughs among,
The breeze return'd her plaintive song

Sacred to love, sweet willow !
Wave gently o'er the bed,
Upon whose grassy pillow
I rest my wearied head.
The breeze no more shall murmur by,
Responsive to my long-hush'd sigh.

In the middle of the romance, *Desdemona*, distracted by her grief, forgets the air. At this moment a violent gust of wind breaks one of the panes of glass, of the gothic window of the chamber; this simple accident makes a deep impression on the mind of the unhappy woman, and is construed by her into an omen of her future fate*. She resumes the song for a mo-

At length exhausted by her grief,
She hush'd her sad complaining;
Death brought the wretched maid relief,
From bonds her soul unchaining.
She died!—Ah, how can I prolong,
The burden of the plaintive song?

* Trifling as this may appear to the philosophy of the North, such a circumstance produced a great impression at Naples, where implicit faith is placed in the *jetatura* (a cant word among the Neapolitans, pronounced, *e. a. tatoura*, from *jetare*, to throw.) If you have a *jetatura*, ill luck is sure to attend you, and, as a charm against it, all the members of a family carry about them a dozen of reliques, or *agnus Dei*; and all the men, a little piece of coral in the form of a *horn*, which they wear appended with the seals of their watch. Many wear one of these *horns* round their neck, like the portrait of a mistress. Frequently they are from eight to ten inches in length, and concealed, as far as it is practicable, under the shirt-frill.

ment, but her tears prevent her from continuing it. She quits the harp, and flies to the bosom of her female attendant for relief. It is impossible, in such a situation, not to think of Mozart, and the thought awakens a sigh of profound regret.

The great merit of this opera, Rossini's *chef d'œuvre* in the forcible style, is, that it is full of fire; it is a perfect volcano, said the critics of *San-Carlo*. Yet it must be observed, that this force is always the same;

When I returned from Palermo to Naples, these curious horns were to be purchased, at a very reasonable rate, at the former place, and I was commissioned with a dozen or two, which I carried with me, with all due gravity, and which I afterwards saw hanging up in the bed-rooms and saloons. During our voyage from Palermo to Naples, the weather was very squally. To pass away the time, I sat on the poop and amused myself with singing. The sailors began to swear, and said I tempted God, and might be the means of a *jetatura*. I might have shared the fate of another Jonas, if I had not shown them the *horns*, which I had, luckily, about me. This appeased them at once, especially when I approached the little image of *Sta. Rosalia*, before which burned a taper, and besought the good saint to forward the system of *mutual instruction* in Sicily; she replied that she would think of it some three hundred years hence.

there are no shades; we never pass

"From gay to grave, from lively to severe;"

The trombones are always in our ears. This violence, which those but little gifted in the arts are apt to mistake for the sublime, is rendered doubly monotonous by the almost total absence of simple recitative. Those of *Otello* are nearly all of the accompanied kind; this is a resource which the composer ought prudently to economize; when he lavishes it upon every occasion, what is he to do in movements where all the power of his art are necessary to be brought into action?

It was after one of the first representations of *Otello*, in one of those evenings of pensive melancholy, which are to be found only in the South, that Madame Gherardi, of Brescia, recounted to us the history of Hortensia and Stradella. It produced upon us an effect, under local circumstances, which it perhaps may not upon the reader. It is a trait of history, and gives a picture of the manners and government of that period.

In 1650, Alessandro Stradella was the most celebrated singer of Venice and of all

Italy. At that period, musical composition was very simple. The *maestro* wrote little more than a sketch; the talent of the singer was much more creative than at the present day, and he was obliged to have recourse to his own genius in almost all the passages which he had to perform. It was Rossini who first thought of writing out at full all the embellishments (*fioriture*) which the singer was to execute. In 1650, the system in Italy was altogether different. The consequence was, that the charm of the music was much more inherent in the person of the singer; and, of the singers then in fashion, no one approached Stradella. It was proverbial, that he was the master of the hearts of his auditors. He went to enjoy his glory at Venice, at that period the most brilliant capital of Italy, and the city of all others the most famous for its various amusements and the gallantry of its manners. Stradella was received with eagerness in the most distinguished houses, and ladies of the first quality contended for the advantage of taking his lessons. He was engaged by a noble Venetian to teach a young lady, of a noble Roman family, of the name of Hortensia.

She was a widow, and publicly courted by a noble Venetian, of one of the most powerful families of the republic. Stradella gained her heart. His portrait was shown us by Madame Gherardi; indeed, it was this picture, together with the feelings of the evening, which had been thrown into a train of melancholy by witnessing the story of Othello, that led to the relation of the anecdote. The portrait was that of a man of a superb figure, with a profound and pensive expression of countenance, and large black eyes, full of that *feu contenu*, that restrained fire, which makes so forcible an impression. The perfection to which the school of Titian and Giorgone carried the art of portrait-painting at Venice, allows us, even at the present day, to form a correct idea of the physiognomy of Stradelli. It is not difficult to believe that such a man, distinguished also by great talents, should have inspired a susceptible heart with passion, and have successfully rivalled a great nobleman, although himself without a fortune. He bore away Hortensia from the noble Venetian. The only thought of the two lovers now was, how to make as rapid a retreat as possible from the territory

of the republic. Naples was the place towards which they directed their flight. After travelling in the most secret manner, they arrived at Rome in their way to that city, where they passed themselves for man and wife. Meantime the Venetian suitor, enraged at their escape, determined to satiate his revenge, by having them assassinated, in whatever part of the world they could be found; and, for this purpose, he hired two desperate bravadoes, by a large sum of money, and the promise of a still larger reward when the work should be accomplished. The assassins proceeded directly to Naples, the place of Stradella's nativity, supposing he would return thither for an asylum, in preference to any other part of Italy. After many fruitless researches in that city, they arrived in Rome, on an evening when there was to be a grand *funzione,* accompanied by music, in the church of St. John of Lateran. Entering with the crowd, they beheld Stradella. It was an oratorio of his own composition, in which he was to sing a principal part. Delighted at having at length found their victim, at the very moment they almost despaired of meet-

ing with him, they resolved to lose no time; the performance was not to close till the dusk of the evening, and they determined to avail themselves of this favourable opportunity for executing their purpose. They then surveyed and ran over the whole church, to ascertain if Hortensia was among the spectators. They were occupied in this search, when, after other pieces executed by common performers, Stradella at length began to sing. They stopped in spite of themselves; they listened to his sublime tones. Assassins as they were, their rocky hearts were softened. What a reflection, that in the whole world there was but one such perfect singer, and they were about to extinguish for ever that enchanting voice that had not its equal on earth! Remorse filled their hearts; they shed tears, and before Stradella's part was finished, had made up their minds to save the lovers, whose death, on receiving the wages of blood, they had sworn upon the Holy Evangelists. Here then we have an instance of the *miraculous* powers of modern music, which may lead us to account for the exaggerated tales of the great musicians of the

days of fable. The ceremony over, they waited a long time for Stradella, outside the church. At last they saw him come from a private door, with Hortensia on his arm. They approached; complimented him on his oratorio, thanked him for the pleasure he had just given them, and confessed that it was to the impression which his voice had made upon them, and the tender feeling which it had excited, that he owed his life. They explained to him the fearful motive of their journey, and advised the lovers to quit Rome without delay, in order that they might make their employer believe that they had arrived too late.

After this providential escape, they hired a vessel, embarked that very night, for the purpose of going by sea to Spezzia, and reaching Turin by cross roads. The noble Venetian, on his part, having received the report of his emissaries, became more furious than ever, and, so far from relinquishing his purpose, was only stimulated to make a new attempt, and resolved to take upon himself the task of avenging his insulted honour. He therefore repaired to Rome to Hortensia's father, and persuaded the old man, that

the stain inflicted on his family could only be effaced by the blood of his daughter and her ravisher. A spirit of vengeance, happily unknown in our days, was promoted by the constitution of the republics of the middle age, and cherished in the too susceptible hearts of the Italians. This was the *honour* of those ferocious times, the sole supplement to the laws, the only means of personal safety, in a country where a duel would have appeared ridiculous. The noble Venetian and the old man commenced a search throughout all the cities of Italy. When at length a report was brought from Turin that Stradella was there, the old Roman, the father of Hortensia, took with him two bravos, celebrated for their address, provided himself with letters of recommendation to the Marquis de Villars, who was at that time ambassador of France to the court of Turin, and set off for Piedmont.

Stradella, on his side, warned by his adventure at Rome, had taken steps at Turin to procure protection. His talents obtained for him that of the Duchess of Savoy, then Regent of the state. This princess undertook to shelter the two lovers from the fury

of their enemy. She placed Hortensia in a convent, and invested Stradella with the title of *Maestro di Capella*, and gave him an apartment in her own palace. These precautions were deemed sufficient; the fears of the lovers began to abate, and they enjoyed perfect tranquillity for several months. They began to imagine, that after the adventure at Rome, the noble Venetian had become weary of pursuing them; when one evening, as Stradella was taking the air on the ramparts of Turin, he was attacked by three men, who stabbed him in the breast and left him for dead. They were the aged father of Hortensia, and his two assassins, who, as soon as they had committed the deed, fled for an asylum to the palace of the French ambassador.

The assault had been witnessed by numbers of persons, who were walking in the same place. The noise of the transaction spread through the whole city, and reached the ears of the Duchess, who instantly ordered the gates to be shut, and the assassins to be demanded of the French ambassador. But, as they had made his palace their sanctuary, he insisted on the privileges granted

to men of his function, refused to give them up, and finally favoured their escape. An inquiry was instituted into the circumstance of the letters of recommendation, when it was discovered that they had been obtained through the influence of one of the most powerful of the Venetian nobility.

However, contrary to all expectations, Stradella was cured of his wound, though it deprived him of the faculty of singing. Thus the Venetian beheld his murderous plans a second time baffled, but without abandoning the desire of vengeance. So implacable and so persevering was the spirit, that he was resolved to attempt the deed alone. To effect his purpose, he assumed an obscure name, and came to reside incognito at Turin, content for the time to watch the motions of Hortensia and her lover. We may perhaps be astonished at the ferocity of those times, but such were the notions of honour that then prevailed, that if the noble Venetian had abandoned the pursuit of vengeance, he would have been an object of scorn and contempt.

A year passed in this manner. The Duchess of Savoy, more and more touched

with the situation of the two lovers, who had suffered so much, and who seemed born for each other, was resolved to sanctify their mutual passion, and had the ceremony of their marriage performed in her own palace. Shortly after this, Hortensia, wearied with her residence at the convent, wished to take an excursion to Genoa. Stradella conducted her thither, and the morning after their arrival, they were both found poignarded in their beds.

CHAP. XII.

Rossini revisits Rome—"Cerentola"—*Proceeds to Milan*—"La Gazza Ladra."

Rossini returned to Rome for the Carnival season, which commences the 26th December, and lasts till about the middle of the February following, where he composed "*La Cenerentola*," for the theatre *Valle*. The music of this opera is altogether Rossinian. Neither Paisiello, Cimarosa, or Guglielmi, ever indulged in the excess

of levity that marks such airs as, "*Una volta, e due, e tre!*" this and many others like it, absolutely border upon the trivial. The cavatina of Don Magnifico, "*Miei rampolli femminini,*" is full of spirit and well adapted to display the powers and flexibility of a bass voice. The det, "*Un segreto d'importanza,*" is the very perfection of the imitative art. It is very probable that this duet would never have existed, had it not been for that of the second act of the "*Matrimonio Secreto,*" "*Se fiato in corpo avete;*" and yet, even if we knew the latter by heart, we should still listen to the duet of Rossini with pleasure. If it be an imitation, it is a legitimate one, and such as only a man of genius could produce.

This duet is followed by an orchestral movement, descriptive of a storm, during which, the carriage of the Prince is supposed to be overturned amidst the darkness. This is not at all in the German style; it neither resembles the storm of Haydn in the "*Four Seasons,*" nor the composition of the same kind in the "*Freischütz,*" of Maria Von Weber. The music has nothing

either noisy or laboured in it, and yet it is true to nature; it has its moment of horror, and forms a pleasing contrast to the levity of the greater part of the rest of the music.

After the tempest comes the charming sestetto, "*Questo è un nodo avilupato*," so remarkable for its originality; the only fault objected to it is, its being too long in the part sung *sotto voce*.

The grand *aria* of "*Cenerentola*," at the end of the opera, is a bravura of considerable power, and highly expressive of the triumph of a good heart, which freely pardons those who have been the cause of her long years of suffering. This is the fifth opera of Rossini that terminates with a grand air by the *prima donna*.

This opera met with considerable success at Rome, and has since become a favorite in most of the capitals of Europe.

At the conclusion of the Carnival, Rossini proceeded to Milan, where, in the spring season of 1817, he composed the celebrated "*Gazza Ladra*."

The public of Milan had taken a pique at Rossini's quitting them for Naples, hence,

on the first evening of its representation, the public flocked to the *Scala* with a full determination of hissing the author of "*Il Barbiere*," "*Elisabetta*," and "*Otello*." Rossini was aware of this disposition on the part of the Milanese, and took his seat at the piano in by no means the best of spirits.

But he was most agreeably disappointed. Never was a piece received with such enthusiasm; *furore* would be the energetic term an Italian would employ. At every instant, the pit arose *en masse*, to hail Rossini with exclamations. At the close of the performance, the composer was heard to declare in the *Café dell' Academia*, that, independent of the exertions of the evening, he was overcome with fatigue at the innumerable obeisances he was called on to make to the public, who were every moment interrupting the performance with *bravo maestro! viva Rossini!*

Never did a more brilliant success attend the first representation of any opera, and the enthusiasm was not at all diminished by the run which it had of a whole season. The overture at once bespoke the favour of the audience. Who that has once heard

this picturesque symphony will easily forget it? The introduction of the drum, as a principal part, gives it a reality which is rarely experienced in any other music. It is descriptive of the return of a young soldier to the bosom of his family, and to the maid of his heart, after the successes of a glorious campaign. All is joy,—but a joy that is to be overcast by a series of melancholy events. Yet the sorrow described is but of short duration, and all again is happiness, doubled by the contrast of intervening events.

The cavatina of *Ninetta,* "*Di piacer mi balza il cor,*" is one of the happiest efforts of Rossini's happy moments. To whom is it not familiar? It paints in the liveliest colours the artless joy of a young peasant girl; it breathes a heartfelt pathos worthy of a Mozart or a Cimarosa; never were the meaning and expression of words more faithfully translated into melody.

It has all the vigour of Cimarosa, and a vivacity to which this delightful composer but rarely attained. There is a pleasing and tender shade of sentiment introduced in the

second part of the air, which makes us overlook the absurdity of the "*Dio d'amore,*" in the mouth of a peasant girl.

The air was the triumph of Madame Camporese's voice, and showed her power of awakening the tenderest sensibilities of the heart. Madame Fodor sings this cavatina with a voice which is above all praise, but defective in pathos and just accentuation. Like all performers who are deficient of sensibility and fire, not being able to render this cavatina *affecting*, she makes it *rich*. She overwhelms the inspirations of the master beneath a load of roulades and ornaments admirably executed, but altogether misplaced. Had Rossini been present, he would have addressed her in the same words he did another celebrated actress; "*Non conosco più le mie arie,*" (I don't know my airs again).

The first phrase, "*Di piacer mi balza il cor,*" ought to be given simply and without any ornaments; they ought to be reserved for the last part of the air, where *Ninetta* dwells upon the excess of her happiness.

Gay and brilliant *fioriture* (embellishments) are properly placed upon such words as, "*Ah! gia dimentico I miei tormenti.*"

At Milan, these shades of the air were well understood, and given with admirable effect by Madame Bellochi. It would be difficult to give an Englishman, who has not visited Italy and been an eye-witness of the intoxication of feeling that seizes an Italian audience when any thing superlatively good claims their attention, any adequate idea of the furor with which this air was received. The pit rose up *en masse* upon the benches. They made Madame Bellochi repeat the air while they remained in this position. Not content with this, they demanded it a third time, when Rossini rose from the piano; "The part of *Ninetta*," said he, addressing the front rows of the pit, "has a considerable deal of music in it, and if you insist on Madame Bellochi's repeating it again, I fear she will be unable to go through the whole of the opera." After some grave discussions in the pit, this was at last consented to.

The air of the young soldier is flat and feeble, and, above all, it is misplaced. On

his first entrance, he flies at once to his mistress, leaving his father, mother, and the whole village, in the back ground, while he sings a song full of passion. Love is deprived of all its interest, when it loses sight of modesty.

The duet, "*Come frenar il pianto,*" is a *chef-d'œuvre* of the magnificent style, but it contains reminiscences of the introduction of the "*Barbiere.*" Some parts of the finale of the first act are accused of the same defect. There are also strong resemblances between the air, "*Mi manca la voce,*" of the Mosè, and the quintetto, "*Un padre, una figlia.*"

The duet, "*E ben, per mia memoria,*" is full of pathos, and it is only to be regretted that there are certain misplaced divisions at the close, which only tend to call off the attention of the audience to the powers of the singer, when it ought solely to be occupied with the feelings of the scene.

The chorus of the judges in the trial scene, "*Tremate, o populi,*" is the very triumph of the magnificent style; it is said to bear a strong resemblance to one of the chorusses in the "*Orfeo*" of Gluck. Its

effect is so imposing, that nobody thinks of laughing at the idea of seeing a whole tribunal in their wigs, break out a singing, at the moment a verdict is on the point of being pronounced; surely no higher eulogium could be uttered in its praise. The prayer, "*Nume benefico*," is of the highest order of music; and yet, strange contradiction, in the same opera, a part of the criminal proceedings commences with a waltz; "*Vuol dir lo stesso:*" and a similar remark will apply to the movement, which poor *Ninetta* is made to sing at the moment of her own condemnation and her father's arrest.

A critic has urged in Rossini's defence, that the movement of the waltz is expressive of the terrible and inevitable *rapidity* of the blows of fate. He says, that it is not the fault of music, if we have introduced the custom of adapting a certain dance, called the *waltz* to this movement; this fashionable folly will, perhaps, pass away in some twenty or thirty years, while the expression of the movement itself is eternal. Some persons might feel satisfied with such reasoning, not so the Milanese. After the

first intoxication of feeling had subsided, they began to see the absurdity of this, and condemned it without mercy.

Some there were, violent partizans of Rossini, who maintained that it was a merit in him to have softened down the atrocity of his subject, and disguised its horror under the light and airy elegance of his *cantilena*. They said, that if Mozart had composed the music of the "*Gazza Ladra*," as it ought to be composed, that is, in the style of the serious parts of "*Don Giovanni*," it would have been productive of a horror, scarcely endurable.

Galli performed the part of *Ninetta's* father with great effect. An anecdote is related of him and our composer, which shows that the latter has a degree of whim even in his malice. At the time Rossini was composing the present opera, he had quarrelled with Galli, from an idea that he was his rival with Signora Marcolini. You must know, that Galli had two or three middle notes in his beautiful voice, which he could take correctly in rapid passages, but which were sure to be out of tune when he was obliged to pause

upon them. Rossini did not fail to contrive a recitative, in which Galli was compelled to dwell upon the identical notes which he was unable to sing accurately. The words occur in the part where he is relating to his daughter the dispute with his captain "*Sciagurato ei grida, &c.*" The best of the joke however was, that Galli, piqued at the circumstance, obstinately refused to transpose these notes in the performance, which there would have been no difficulty in doing; the consequence was, that his own reputation suffered by this wickedly contrived passage.

CHAPTER XIII.

Rossini returns to Naples—"Armida"—"Adelaide di Borgogna"—"Adina, osia il Califfo di Bagdad"—"Mosè in Egitto"—*The Poet Tortola—Anecdote of the air*, "Dal tuo stellato soglio"—*Rossini's Independance of Character.*

Crowned with fresh laurels, Rossini returned to Naples in the Autumn of 1817, and immediately gave his "*Armida.*" On the day of its first representation, the public visited him with the sins of Signora Colbran's voice. Besides, they were piqued at the extraordinary success of the "*Gazza Ladra*" at Milan, and could not understand why Rossini should produce any thing inferior for themselves. There is nothing so dangerous to disappoint a public in, as in the expectation of their pleasures. "*Armida*" was very coldly received, in spite of its magnificent duet, "*Amor possente nume;*" perhaps the most celebrated that ever proceeded from this composer's pen.

The genius of Rossini is eminently fitted for the pleasurable and voluptuous. An in-

tense indulgence, at the expense, however, of delicacy of sentiment, is the ground-work of some of his finest airs. This is particularly evident in the present duet. I remember, one morning, when it had been executed in the sublimest manner at the *casino* of Bologna, that several ladies were embarrassed at expressing their opinion of its beauties.

The author of the *libretto* has contrived to despoil his beautiful subject of all its interest, and has made sad havoc with the classical text of Tasso. This opera contains several striking and very powerful choruses.

Of the opera "*Adelaide de Borgogna*," which was brought out at Rome in the carnival of the same year, but little is known except the air, "*O crude stelle*!" which is often performed, and heard with delight.

Of the opera "*Adina, ossia il Califfo di Bagdad*," the only particulars we are able to collect are, that it was written for the opera at Lisbon, and performed there in 1818, at the theatre *San-Carlo* in that city.

"*Mosé in Egitto*"* was produced at

* The opera known with us under the title of "*Pietro L'Eremita*."—T.

Naples the same year, in the theatre *San-Carlo*, and performed, in the first instance, as a kind of oratorio during the lent season. The piece commences by what is called the plague of darkness, a plague so easily to be inflicted on the stage, and on that account so nearly bordering on the ridiculous: it is but to turn off the gas, and the business is done. The critics were disposed to smile at the rising of the curtain, but this feeling of levity was soon subdued by the solemn and impressive movement of the introduction. Overcome by the groans of his suffering people, Pharao exclaims: "*Venga Mosè!*" Benedetti, who supported the character of Moses, appeared in a simple and sublime costume, which he had copied from the celebrated statue of Michael Angelo in *San Pietro in Vincoli*. I shall never forget the impression produced by the solemnity of the appeal: "*Eterno, immenso, incomprensibil Dio!*" inforced by some of the most solemn strains of which music is capable. This entrance of Moses recalls every thing that is sublime in Haydn, and perhaps recalls it too strongly. Up to this period, Rossini had composed nothing so learned as this intro-

duction, which extends to the middle of the first act, and in which he has ventured to repeat the same form of song, the same *motivos*, at least twenty times, at very short intervals. This piece of hardihood and patience must have cost not a little to a genius as lively as that of Rossini.

The success of this opera was immense. Every good Parisian, in applauding a scene of Voltaire or Racine, at the same time applauds himself for his literary knowledge and the certainty of his taste. At each verse of Racine, he passes rapidly in review all the good reasons that have been adduced by the French rhetoricians, de la Harpe, Geoffroy, Dessault, &c. to prove why he should not admire it. They are not less learned in Naples with respect to music. It was for this reason that, on the announcement of a very learned composition by Rossini, the self-love of the Neapolitans was awakened, who were delighted with an opportunity of applauding something scientific. I beheld around me vanity under twenty different forms, proud of an occasion of displaying its knowledge: one exclaimed on hearing a brilliant chord struck by the violoncellos,

another at a note of the horn introduced exactly where it ought to be; some, already envious of Rossini, while they raised the introduction to the skies, applauded it with a malignant air, to give their neighbours to understand that there was no doubt of its having been pilfered from some German author.

The magnificent duet, "*Ah! se puoi così lasciarmi,*" was received with acclamations of applause; *bravo maestro! evviva Rossini!* resounded from every part of this immense theatre. The young prince, the son of Pharao, has secretly fallen in love with a young Israelite; the people are commanded to depart, and the two lovers meet to bid each other an eternal adieu. This is one of the great subjects for a duo, which affords such scope to the energies of music, and of which Rossini has so often and so happily availed himself. This is not a piece of music of the moment; it must last as long as powerful feeling itself shall endure. The bass solo, "*Taci, o Regina,*" was received with great and deserved applause; it presented a favourable opportunity for the display of Porto's powerful voice.

In the third act, the poet Tottola had

sadly perplexed the machinists of the theatre by the introduction of the passage of the Red Sea; he did not reflect that the execution of this part of history was not so easy as the plague of darkness. From the situation of the pit, it is impossible to give a view of the sea except in the distance: in the present instance, it was absolutely necessary that it should appear more in the fore-ground, in order to represent the passage of the Israelites with effect. The machinist of *San-Carlo*, in attempting to resolve this important problem, had fallen most woefully into the ludicrous. The pit beheld the sea raised five or six feet above its banks, and the boxes, overlooking the waves, saw the little lazzaroni whose business it was to roll backwards the silken waves at the voice of Moses. The whole house burst into laughter, but they were good-natured in their merriment; they would not be angry, and repressed those hisses which an audience of our own would not have failed to pour forth without mercy. They were willing to overlook this absurdity at the end of the piece, and did nothing but talk of the beauty of the *Introduzione*.

The next day, it was whispered that this opera was the work of I know not what German master. As for myself, it appeared to me evident that there was too much of Rossini's spirit, and too many of those orchestral turns *a la sans-souci*, if I may be allowed the expression, for it to be German. However, as in point of plagiarism, every thing may be feared from the indolence of Rossini, I could not help feeling something of the general doubt. To make sure of the fact, some of Rossini's enemies wrote to the said German composer to beg him to state candidly whether the work was his or not. A few weeks after, a letter was received from this poor devil of a composer, protesting with all the simplicity in the world, that he really was not the author of the introduction to the "*Mosè*," and that he had never in his life composed any thing so good. This satisfied the most incredulous; the fame of the "*Mosè*" spread daily, and the Neapolitans were more and more delighted with applauding the science and beautiful harmonies which it contained.

The following season it was resumed with the same enthusiastic admiration of the first

act, and the same bursts of laughter at the passage of the Red Sea. The following day, one of my friends called about noon on Rossini, who, as usual, was lounging in his bed, and giving audience to a dozen of his friends; when, to the great amusement of all, in rushed the poet Tottola, who, without saluting any one, exclaimed: "*Maestro! Maestro! ho salvato l'atto terzo.*"—"*Eh! che hai fatto?*" *&c.* "Maestro! I have saved the third act."—"Ah! what can you have done, my good friend?" replied Rossini, mimicking the half burlesque, half pedantic, manner of this poor son of the Muses; "Depend upon it they will laugh in our faces as usual."—"Maestro, I have made a prayer for the Hebrews before the passage of the Red Sea."—Upon this the poet pulls from his pocket, a large bundle of papers, as formidable as a lawyer's brief, and gives them to Rossini, who immediately set about deciphering the desperate scrawl. While he is reading, the poet salutes the company, smilingly, all around, every moment whispering in the composer's ear; "*Maestro, e lavoro d'un ora.*"—"*He! lavoro d'un ora*"—"What! the work of an hour!" exclaimed Rossini.

The poor poet, shrinking into nothing, and trembling lest the composer should play off upon him one of his usual practical jokes, shrugs up his shoulders, forces out a laugh, and, looking at Rossini, exclaims, "*Si Signor*; *si Signor Maestro !*"—"Well, if it has taken you an hour to write this prayer, I engage to make the music in a quarter of the time; here, give me a pen and ink." At these words, Rossini jumps out of bed, seats himself at a table *en chemise*, and in eight or ten minutes at the farthest, had composed this sublime movement, without any piano, and in the midst of the clatter of the conversation of his friends. "There," said Rossini, "there is your music, away about your business."—The poet is off like lightning, and Rossini jumped into bed, and joins in the general laugh at poor Tottola's parting look of amazement. The following evening I did not fail to repair in good time to *San-Carlo*. The same transports attended the first act; but, when they came to the famous passage of the Red Sea, there were the same pleasantries, and the same disposition to laugh. But this was repressed the instant *Moses* began the new and sublime air:

"*Dal tuo stellato soglio.*" This is the prayer that all the people repeat after Moses in chorus. Surprised at this novelty, the pit was all attention. This beautiful chorus is in the minor key; *Aaron* takes it up, and the people continue it. Last of all, *Elcia* addresses the same vows to heaven, the people answer; at this moment they all throw themselves on their knees, and repeat the same prayer with enthusiasm; the prodigy is wrought, the sea opens to present a passage to the chosen people. The last part of the movement is in the major key. It would be difficult to give an idea of the thunder of applause that resounded from every part of the theatre. The spectators leaned over the boxes to applaud, exclaiming, "*bello! bello! o che bello!*" Never did I behold such a furor, which was rendered still more striking by the contrast it presented to the previous disposition of the house to be merry. The success of the "*Gazza ladra*" at Milan, though immense, was tranquillity itself compared to this. Happy people! this was no longer an applause *à la Française*, the applause of self-sufficient vanity, as in the first act; it was the genuine tribute

of hearts overflowing with pleasure, and grateful for the boon thus gratuitously bestowed upon them. Let it, after this, be denied if it can, that music has a direct and physical effect upon the nerves.

The Germans are persuaded that "*Mosé*" is the *chef-d'œuvre* of Rossini. Nothing can be more sincere than this praise: the Italian master has condescended to speak their language—he has been learned—he has sacrificed to harmony.

As to myself, *Mosé* has always struck me as somewhat tedious. I do not deny but that I enjoyed great pleasure at the first representations, and once a month, if well sung, I can still hear it with satisfaction; but it appears to me to be deficient in dramatic effect. Those operas of Rossini which possess this character, I can hear with lively pleasure twenty times together.

"*Mosé*" was the first opera for which Rossini was remunerated in a suitable manner: it produced him 4200 francs: he had received only 600 for his "*Tancredi*," and a hundred louis for his "*Otello*." The custom in Italy is, for the score of an opera to remain the property of the *impressario*

for the space of two years, after which, it becomes that of the public. It is in consequence of this absurd law, that the music-seller, Ricordi, of Milan, has gained a fortune by Rossini's operas, while their author has been left in poverty.

Far from deriving an annual income from his operas, as would be the case in France, Rossini is obliged to have recourse to the complaisance of these *impressarj*, if it happens that, during the first two years, he wishes to produce these works in any other theatre, than that for which they were composed.

Rossini has been often advised to go to Paris, and re-set the comic operas of Sedain, Marmontel, and other good writers, who have introduced dramatic effect into their works. In six months Rossini would have amassed a fortune of two hundred a-year, a sum by no means unimportant to him, before his marriage with Signora Colbran. In other respects, nothing could be more ill-advised than such a step. Were Rossini to live six months among the French, he would become a common every-day kind of man ; he might have two or three crosses

of honour more, but much less gaity of character, and no genius: his mind would soon have lost its wonted energy and elasticity. Only look, I do not say at our great artists, for I would not wish to be thought invidious, but, for example, to the life of Goethe, written by himself, and particularly to the "*Histoire de l'Expedition de Campagne,*" and see what men of genius gain by coming within the atmosphere of courts. Canova refused to live at that of Napoleon, at Paris. Rossini would, doubtless, have come in continual contact with the court; heretofore his principal connexions have been with the *impressarj* and singers, and Rossini, the poor Italian artist, has a hundred times more dignity in his manner of thinking, and a more noble independence of spirit, than Goethe, with all his philosophy. In the eyes of the former, a prince is but a man invested with magisterial duties, more or less elevated, and of which he acquits himself more or less meritoriously.

In France, Rossini would have been nothing, unless he had become a man bristling with repartée, a pleasing man with the ladies, and who knows? a politician. The

state of society in Italy has allowed him to be only one thing—a musician. A black waistcoat, a blue coat, and a cravat once a day, is a costume, which he would not abandon, though his obstinacy should cost him the loss of an introduction to the greatest princess in the world. Such a barbarism does not prevent him from being less welcome in Italy among the ladies. In France it would have been—"Oh, the bear!" Hence it is, that in this land of excessive polish, there are numbers of spruce and charming artists, who are every thing in the world, except *faiseurs de chefs-d'œuvres* (creators of masterpieces.)

CHAP. XIV.

Of the Revolution caused by Rossini in Song—On describing the Characteristic Traits of different Singers—Strong Feeling indispensible in the Fine Arts—Canova—Requisites, in order to enjoy the true Beautiful in Music—Disappointed Composers turn Critics—State of Singing when Rossini began his Career—Rossini and Velluti—Rosini and Colbran—Operas in Rossini's second manner.

The Gabriellis, the Todis, the de'Amicis, the Bantis, have passed away; nothing remains of their enchanting talents, but the fame, the voice of which grows daily more feeble, and is overwhelmed by the exaggerated praises of cotemporary artists. Such is the fate of a Le Kain, a Garrick, a Sestini, a Pacchiarotti.

We have seen many sciences, and some arts, spring up under our own eyes: for instance, a taste for the picturesque, in landscapes and in pleasure-gardens, which was unknown in the days of Voltaire, and of which the sombre chateaus built under Louis XV., with their paved court-yards, and their long avenues of clipped trees,

stand as melancholy testimonies. Nothing is more natural, than that the more delicate arts, those whose object is to administer pleasure to souls of feeling and sensibility, should be the last to spring up.

Perhaps, in our days, the true art may be discovered, of describing, with exactitude, the talent of a Mademoiselle Mars, a Pasta, or a Catalani; so that a hundred years hence, the sublime but fugitive talents of these artists may be distinctly pourtrayed, and definitely understood, by a future generation. If an exact portrait of the characteristic talents of great singers could be taken, not only the glory of the individual would gain thereby, but the art itself would make immense advances. Philosophers have thought, that what forms the essential difference between the genius of man and the extraordinary instinct of certain animals, is the faculty possessed by the former, of transmitting to other individuals of his own species, the progress, however inconsiderable, which he has made in that particular art or profession in which it has been exercised. Such transmission is complete with respect to a Euclid and a Lagrange;

it holds good only to a certain point in regard to the art of a Raphael, a Canova, and a Morghen; may it not one day be established with reference to the art of a Davide,* a Catalani, a Fodor? Towards the advancement of this object, I shall offer a few hints.

In the first place, to be capable of enjoying the beauty of the fine arts, we must feel strongly. I will remark, in passing, that the persons renowned for their wisdom, either in a nation or in a particular society, are never chosen from among those beings, who have received from heaven the gift of feeling strongly. But a very small number of those gifted individuals, such as an Aristotle, among the ancients, have been en-

* Davide, the father, who, as a singer, was no less celebrated than his son, used to reproach the latter very severely, for not giving sufficient *sweetness* to his song, and of sacrificing too much to powers of execution; it so enraged him one day, that he was on the point of giving his son a lesson in the shape of a horse-whip. I heard Davide the father sing at the theatre of Lodi, in 1820; he was then said to be seventy years of age. He lives at Bergamo, the place of residence also of the good Mayer, author of "*Ginevra di Scozia.*"

dowed with the astonishing faculty of analizing to-day, with perfect exactness, the powerful sensations which yesterday filled them with the most lively transports. As to the vulgar herd of philosophers, though the powers of their logic may prevent them from falling into error, with respect to other important objects of research, yet when they come to meddle with the fine arts, where strong feelings are in question, it is well if they do not come from the attempt covered with ridicule. Such was the fate of d'Alembert, and of a host of others, whose names it would be profanation to mention with his.

What distinguishes nations with respect to painting, poetry, music, &c. is the greater or less number of pure and spontaneous sensations which the individuals of those nations, even those of the vulgar class, receive from the arts. People who passionately love music, though of ever so wretched a kind, will be nearer to a good taste than those *reasoning* men who love even the most perfect music, according to rule, principle, and *moderation*.

Canova used to relate a little anecdote

which he heard from one of his American admirers. It was respecting a savage, who beheld for the first time a figure in a peruque in a window at *Cincinati*. Canova showed a little paper of eight lines, which was a translation of the expressions of astonishment and enthusiasm which fell from this savage at the sight of this wooden head, the first imitation of a human figure he had ever beheld. The modesty of Canova, who was one of the simplest and most unaffected of men, prevented him from adding what we will tell for him. A man of taste, on beholding Canova's sublime group of Venus and Adonis, at the house of the Marquese di Berio, at Naples, in which this great sculptor has depicted the goddess as agitated by a sad presentiment, at the moment of her bidding adieu to her lover, who is going to the chase, in which he perishes: a man of the most finished taste, on contemplating this admirable *chef-d'œuvre* of grace and delicacy of sentiment,* expressed his admiration precisely in the terms employed by

* It is through *motion* that music elevates the soul to sentiments the most delicate, and is enabled to render them sensible even to the grossest eyes. A

the savage. Thus it is evident, that the effect produced by intense admiration upon the minds of these two men, was absolutely the same; the only difference, unhappily but too common a one, is, where the admirer of Canova is a pedant, whose first solicitude is to make himself admired. The whole difference lies in the *exterior object*, which excites the same degree of admiration and delight in two beings, in other respects so different from each other. It is but too evident, that expressions of admiration in the arts go no farther than to prove the degree of enthusiasm in the man who admires, and by no means the degree of merit in the thing admired.

When a man tells you that he admires a great singer, Catalani or Fodor, for instance,

millionaire once moved feels for an instant like a man of mind.

It is through the *opposite to motion* that sculpture makes us conceive the delicacy of a sentiment. One evening, when Rossini was in the vein, he promised to translate into a beautiful duet the sublime group of Venus and Adonis, which we had been contemplating by torch-light. "If you are determined upon it," said the Marquese di Berio, "first of all swear by the manes of Pergolese."

the first question to be asked is, whether this man was born in a religion where good singing is admitted into the churches? Suppose a man, of a mind the most susceptible of enjoying the concord of sweet sounds; if born at Glasgow, how would you have him admire a Davide? All must be simplicity with him; the ornaments of Davide would to him be incomprehensible things. The inhabitant of Glasgow, who, though in other respects, a very estimable man, has never had an opportunity of hearing fine music but three or four times in his life, would be, with respect to Davide, what we ourselves were with regard to a painter of Berlin, who had represented one of the battles of Frederick the Great on a piece of ivory of the size of a crown piece. Except by the help of a glass we could distinguish nothing. The glass which is wanting to the inhabitant of Glasgow, is the pleasure of having applauded, at fifty representations, the "*Barbiere di Seviglia*," sung by the delightful voice of Madame Fodor. The inhabitant of every village in Italy hears singing twice or thrice a-week at church, and music in every street, written, if you

please, without much genius, but executed with neatness and precision,—qualities that suffice for the education of the ear. This is what is entirely wanting to the inhabitant of Glasgow.

Music may boast of having made an immense progress in a country, when the reply made by the majority of an audience, to justify their applause, is—"*the thing pleases me.*" Such would doubtless have been the reply of the Athenians if a stranger had asked them to give a reason for the transports which a tragedy of Eschylus excited among them; the treatises of Aristotle had not yet opened the mouths of people who have nothing to say. On the contrary, now-a-days all the world aspires to explain the *why and the wherefore* of their enthusiasm; and the utmost contempt would be shown to an unsophisticated visitant of the opera, who should reply with unaffected simplicity —"*Because I feel it.*" But this is not all; the misfortune is that the evil extends still further. An audience determined to judge in the absence of all feeling, have created a crowd of artists: poets by virtue of the poetics of Aristotle, and musicians by virtue

of musical institutions.* The consequence is that society is overrun with poor artists, who, in their youth, having nothing to offer at the shrine of the arts, but the cold inspirations of a soul devoid of enthusiasm; and, later in life, but those mortifications of spirit, which are the effect of humbled vanity, and a heart overflowing with spleen. Some of these poor artists, out of heart at the hisses with which they are always received, set themselves up for judges; they print, and we read such amusing phrases as the following—*The sepulchral voice of Madame Pasta!*—this, with respect to music, is to deny that light is light.

What tends to destroy the arts in a nation, or, at least, to hinder their growth, is that class of critics whose souls are without sensibility, and deficient of a certain tinge of the *romantic*, but who, for the rest, have studied, with cool perseverance and mathematical exactitude, every thing that has been said

* All the governments of Europe are establishing conservatories; there are many princes who really love music, and are solicitous to support its interests: but, after all, will they ever create a Rossini or a Davide,—real composers and real singers?

or written upon the unhappy art which they afflict with their learning. We here find, in nature, the reality of an image that has become a common place in poetic theories:—that an excess of cultivation is fatal to the progress of the fine arts.* I hasten from making an odious application of these general reflections, to continue the history of Rossini.

When this great composer began his career in 1810, of all the fine arts, that of music had felt most sensibly the fatal effects of war, with all its cruel reactions. In the north of Italy, at Milan, Brescia, Bergamo, and Venice, the public mind, since 1797, had been engaged by objects very different from those of music and song. Even in 1810, the conservatory at Milan, had produced no talent of any note. At Naples, not one of those celebrated establishments was existing at this period, which had for such a length of time supplied Europe with Masters and singers,

* Composers hissed by the public, are, of all enemies, the most dangerous to music. The true judges of music now-a-days are young ladies of from eighteen to five-and-twenty.

capable of awakening a true enthusiasm for music, and of making its power be thoroughly felt. Singing was no longer taught except in some obscure churches; and the two last men of genius, whom Naples produced, the composers Orgitano and Manfrocci, had been educated there only at the commencement of their career. There was no one to succeed them, and nothing was found on the banks of the Serbeto but silence, nothingness, or the feeble attempts of an incurable mediocrity. Babini, that great singer, who has remained without a rival, had seen Rossini; but his voice was enfeebled by age, and he could only recount to the composer the miracles that it had once performed. Crescentini shone at Saint-Cloud, where he led Napoleon* into the only piece of folly with which the civil government of this great man can be reproached; but, though a chevalier *de la couronne de fer*, he was lost to Italy. Marchesi was no longer upon the stage.

The sublime Pacchiarotti saw, with tears in his eyes, the downfall of the art, which

* *Natum pati et agere fortia*, a verse written on St. Ignatius of Loyala.

had formed the charm and glory of his life. With what feelings must not the soul of this true artist have been overwhelmed, he who had never allowed himself to utter a note or make a single motion, without having previously considered how far it was calculated to answer the existing wants of the spectator, the only end of all his efforts, when he beheld a great singer actuated by the pitiful ambition of rivaling the violin* in mechanical merit, in a variation of thirty-two demi-semiquavers to a bar! That art, which was formerly the most touching, is quietly settling itself down into a simple matter of business. After a Babini, a Pacchiarotti, a Marchesi, and a Crescentini, the art of song has fallen to so sad an ebb, as to be now-a-days, with a very few exceptions, a mere correct and inanimate execution of a certain number of notes. So little does it require, in 1823, for the formation of a good singer! But the *ottavino*,† the great drum, the serpent, have the

* At a later period, Madame Catalani has sung the variations of Rode: what a pity that nature forgot to place a heart in the neighbourhood of that divine throat!

† The octave flute, one of Rossini's favorite instruments.

same ambition, and attain to it with nearly the same success. The invention of the moment has been banished, that happy art by which so many fine effects are often obtained from the extemporaneous performance of a singer; and it is Rossini whom I accuse of this great revolution, so fatal to the interests of the art.

We have seen that, through the political circumstances of Italy, Rossini, at his first entrance upon his musical career, found but a very small number of good singers, and the few that were left, were on the point of quitting the stage. In spite of this state of poverty and decline of the art, so different to the abundant means that were in the hands of the ancient composers, Rossini, in his first productions, remained faithful to the *style* of his predecessors; he respected the claims of the voice, and only sought to augment the triumph of song. Such is the system upon which "*Demetrio e Polibio*," "*L'Inganno felice*," "*La Pietra del Paragone*," "*Tancredi*," *&c.* were composed; Rossini then wrote for Marcolini, Malanotte, Manfredini, and the family of the Monbelli. Why did he not

continue to pursue this happy system,—he who is himself so good a vocalist, and who, when he takes his place at the piano to try one of his own airs, seems so transformed into the singer, that we can scarcely pursuade ourselves he is at the same time, the inventor of the song? A little event took place, which produced an instantaneous effect on the young composer's mind, and made him at once alter his views. The errors into which this has been the means of leading him, is a source of deep mortification and regret to his most serious admirers.

Rossini arrived at Milan, in 1814, then twenty-two years of age, to compose the "*Aureliano in Palmira.*" There he became acquainted with Velluti, who was to sing in his opera. Velluti, then in the flower of his youth and talents, and one of the handsomest men of his time, had no small share of vanity, and was fond of displaying, and of abusing, the powers of voice with which nature had gifted him. Before Rossini had an opportunity of hearing this great singer, he had written a cavatina for the character he was to perform. At the first rehearsal, Velluti began to sing, and

Rossini was struck with admiration: at the second rehearsal, Velluti began to show his powers in gracing (*fiorire*); Rossini found the effect produced, just and admirable, and highly applauded the performance: at the third, the simplicity of the cantilena was entirely lost, amidst the luxuriancy of the ornaments. At last the great day of the first performance arrives; the cavatina and the whole character sustained by Velluti, was received with furor; but scarcely did Rossini know what Velluti was singing—it was no longer the music he had composed: still, the song of Velluti was full of beauties, and succeeded with the public to admiration: after all, can it be said that they were in the wrong for applauding what gave them so much pleasure?

The pride of the young composer was not a little wounded; his opera fell, and it was the soprano alone who had any success. The ardent mind of Rossini at once perceived all the advantages that might be taken of such an event: not a single suggestion was lost upon him.

It was by a lucky chance, we may suppose him to have said to himself, that

Velluti discovered he had a taste of his own; but who will say that, in the next theatre for which I compose, I may not find some other singer who, with as great a flexibility of voice, and an equal rage for ornaments, may so spoil my music, as not only to render it contemptible to myself, but tiresome to the public? The danger to which my poor music is exposed, is still more imminent, when I reflect upon the great number of different schools for song that exist in Italy. The theatres are filled with performers, who have learned music from some poor provincial professor. This mode of singing violin concertos, and variations without end, tends to destroy, not only the talent of the singer, but also to vitiate the taste of the public. Every singer will make a point of imitating Velluti, without calculating upon the relative compass of his voice. We shall see no more simple cantilenas; they would appear cold and tasteless. Every thing is about to undergo a change, even to the nature of the voice. Once accustomed to embellish, to over-load the cantilena with high-wrought ornaments, and, to stifle the work of the composer, they will soon

discover that they have lost the habit of sustaining the voice and expanding the tones, and consequently the power of executing *largo* movements; I must, therefore, lose no time in changing the system I have followed heretofore.

I am not myself ignorant of singing; all the world allows me a talent this way; my embellishments shall be in good taste; for I shall at once be able to discover where my singers are strong, and where defective, and I will write nothing for them but what they can execute. My mind is made up: I will not leave them room for a single *appogiatura*. These ornaments, this method of charming every ear, shall form an *integral* part of my song, and shall be *all* written down in my score.

And, as for those good gentlemen, the *impressarj*, who pretend to pay me handsomely, by giving me for sixteen or eighteen pieces, for the first characters, the same as they gave my predecessors for four, or six pieces at the most, I know a way of being even with them. In every fresh opera, I will serve up three or four of these pieces, which shall have nothing new in

them but the variations. Instead of being left to the caprice of some miserable singer, without either life or invention, they shall be all written down in full, with taste and science; and yet, after all, the advantage will be entirely on the side of these rascally *impressarj*.

At a later period, at Naples, Signora Colbran, having only a broken voice to assist her through his grand operas,* he was obliged, still more cautiously, to avoid the *spianato* and *sostenuto,* and to dash furiously into the *gorgheggi* (the *warble,*) the only species of song in which Signora Colbran can acquit herself with any honour. An attentive examination of the scores written by Rossini, at Naples, will show how far his passion for the *prima donna* carried him; scarcely a single air is found in the *cantabile spianato* (the smooth and flowing) style, either for herself, or, for the best of all possible reasons, for the other performers. Rossini was no longer solicitous

* Rossini wrote, for Naples, nine of his principal operas; *Elisabetta, Otello, Armida, Mosè, Ricciardo e Zoraide; Ermione, La Donna del Lago, Maometto secondo,* and *Zelmira*; between 1815 and 1822.

for his own glory; indeed, perhaps, of all artists, he is the one the most careless upon this point. A fatal consequence of this complaisance to Signora Colbran is, that of these nine operas composed at Naples, not one can be sung elsewhere, without losing a great portion of its effect.

Had Signora Colbran only possessed an extraordinary compass of voice, an easy resource would have been to transpose the parts *(puntare)*; and, by this simple process, certain notes belonging to the peculiar diapason for which the master had to write, would disappear. By means of this transposition two good singers, though with very different voices, may often produce a great effect in the same character.*

Unfortunately, it is not so with the music which Rossini composed at Naples. The difficulty is not merely as to the compass of the voice, but with that more stubborn, and almost insurmountable obstacle, the *quality and nature of the ornaments.*

* Upon the same principal, the air "*Di tanti palpiti*," has been sung with great success, in three different *tones*.

For the truth of this assertion, I appeal to any amateur who has read the different parts, destined for Davide or Signora Colbran.

Thus it was, that Velluti, at Milan, in the "*Aureliano in Palmira*," gave Rossini the first idea of that revolution, of which, at a later period, he was to be the author; and Signora Colbran, at Naples, obliged him to carry this revolution to an extent, I think, fatal to his glory.

The operas written at Naples, which we have enumerated above, form what is termed Rossini's *second manner*.

CHAP. XV.

"Ricciardo e Zoraide"—"Ermione"—"Odoardo e Cristina"—*Anecdote of the latter Opera*—"La Donna del Lago"—*Unsuccessful on the first representation—Succeeds on the second—Rossini goes to Milan.*

In the autumn of 1818, Rossini produced at *San-Carlo,* his serious opera of "*Ricciardo e Zoraida;*" the principal characters of which were sustained by Signora Colbran, Nozzari, Davide, Benedetti, and Signora Pisaroni. The *libretto* is by the Marquese di Berio, who lately died here. He was one of the most amiable of men, and a great patron and friend of Rossini. He was a great encourager of the arts and of letters, and his loss is severely felt in the polished circles of Naples. The story of the piece is taken from the poem of "*Ricciardetto;*" but it must be confessed that it does not breathe that lyric interest, which was likely to inspire Rossini with a profusion of brilliant thoughts.

This, like several of this composer's

operas, has no overture. Rossini has often tried to convince the managers and his friends, by a number of very specious arguments, that overtures are not only very unnecessary, but very absurd things; but I believe the true secret is, that Rossini does not like the labour of composing them, and that his reasonings serve only as a pretext for his natural indolence.

The *Introduzione* is very brilliant and spirited. The duet in the first act, "*In van tu fingi, ingrata!*" between Colbran and Pisaroni, met with much applause, as did also the *terzetto*, "*Cruda sorte,*" between the same singers and Nozzari. This is one of the happiest pieces of the whole opera; the first movement is recommended by its novelty, and the second by the energy and impassioned feeling which it breathes throughout. It was tumultuously encored, and the frequent—"*bravo maestro!*" that resounded from every part of the house, summoned the composer from his seat at the piano, to make his usual grave obeisance to the audience. A cavatina of Davide, "*Frena o ciel,*" and the duet in the second act, "*Ricciardo che venga?*" were

also much and deservedly applauded. A sestetto, in the first finale, without any accompaniment, beginning "*Confusa, smarita!*" is full of beautiful harmony. The style of the opera is oriental, magnificent, and impassioned; and it met with entire success.

On the 20th February, 1819, he brought out a cantata, written in honor of his Majesty, the King of Naples, and sung by Signora Colbran, at the theatre *San-Carlo*. It was full of grace and expression, and the simple and appropriate accompaniment was much admired.

During the Lent of the same year, he produced his serious opera of "*Ermione*." It was so coldly received, as to amount almost to a failure; only a very few parts of it were applauded. The *libretto* was taken from the "*Andromaque*." It was an essay of Rossini's. He wished to imitate the style of Gluck, and attempt something after the manner of the French opera; but it was but an attempt, and one that he will most probably not feel much disposed to renew.*

* It was remarked, of "*Ermione*," that throughout the whole of it only one kind of colouring was predominant, that of anger. Anger in music is only good

On the 9th of May following, he produced a cantata, which was performed on occasion of a visit made by his Majesty, Francis I. of Austria, to the theatre *San-Carlo*. It was sung by Colbran, Davide, and Rubini, and

when employed in contrast with the gentler passions. It is a Neapolitan axiom, that the anger of the guardian, should precede the tender air of the ward.

Piqued at the coolness with which two of his operas had been received, Rossini was determined to conquer a success, independent of Signora Colbran. Like the Germans, he had recourse to his orchestra, and from an accessary, converted it into a principal. He fully revenged himself on the ill success of "*Armida*" and "*Ermione*," by the different style to which he had recourse in his future Operas. From this moment, the taste of Rossini was entirely changed. It required but little effort to compose *harmony* full of sprightliness and gaiety; whereas, it was no easy matter, and especially to a man of his natural indolence, to find new *melodies*, after having nearly exhausted himself in twenty operas.

In his later compositions, Rossini found a resource in the voice of Signora Pisaroni, a superb *contr'alto*, and a singer of decidedly the first order. The men for whom he wrote, were Garcia, Davide, the son, and Nozzari, all three tenors. Davide is the first tenor living, he throws much genius into his songs, sings constantly *improviso*, and sometimes commits himself; Garcia, is remarkable for the surprising certainty of his voice; Nozzari was considered one of the best singers in Europe, but his voice is now the least beautiful of the three.

honoured by the gracious notice of the Sovereign.

Rossini was very active this year, 1819. Besides the works above mentioned, he also composed an opera, entitled "*Odoardo e Cristina*," which was performed in the spring, at the theatre *San-Benedetto* at Venice. This opera introduced to the public Carolina Cortesi, one of the prettiest actresses that has appeared upon the stage for some years. The history of this opera is curious.

The *impressario* of *San-Benedetto* had engaged Rossini for a consideration of from four to five hundred sequins; an enormous sum in Italy. The *libretto* which he sent to Rossini at Naples was entitled "*Odoardo e Cristina*."

Rossini, who was at that time desperately in love with Signora Chaumel, or *Comelli*, could not tear himself away from Naples, till within a fortnight previous to the opening of the theatre of Venice. To pacify the impatience of the *impressario*, he had transmitted him from time to time a quantity of charming pieces of music. The words, it is true, were somewhat different from those that had been sent him from Ve-

nice; but, who pays any attention to the words of a serious opera? It is always the same thing over again, *felicità, felice ognora, crude stelle,* &c.; and at Venice nobody reads a *libretto serio,* not even, I believe, the *impressario* who pays for it. At length, only nine days before the first representation, Rossini appears. The opera begins; it is applauded with transport; but unfortunately there was a Neapolitan merchant in the pit, who sung the *motivo** of all the new pieces, even before the singers began them. His neighbours were all amazement. He was asked where he had heard the new music? "*New* music! (said he,) why this is from '*Ermione*' and '*Ricciardo;*' things we have been applauding at Naples these six months. I was just going to ask why you had changed the title of the opera. The duet, '*Ah, nati in ver noi siamo,*' which is one of the prettiest things in '*Ricciardo,*' Rossini has changed into the cavatina of your new opera; and what is still better, he has not even changed the words."

* The leading subject or predominant passage of an air.

During the divertisement, and the ballet, this fatal piece of news was circulated every where, and the *caffés* were full of *dilettanti*, who were seen conning the matter over, and endeavouring, as well as they could, to qualify their admiration. At Milan, such a thing would have roused the national vanity into fury; at Venice, it only raised a laugh. Ancillo, a delightful poet, penned upon the spot a sonnet on the unhappiness of Venice and the happiness of Signora Comelli. In the mean time, the poor *impressario*, distracted, and with ruin staring him in the face, runs to look for Rossini; he finds him: "Well, what did I promise you?" says the latter, with the utmost *sang-froid* imaginable; "to write something for you that should be applauded. This has been successful, *e tanto basta*. Besides, if you had but common sense, would you not have perceived by the soiled and worn edges of the copy, that it was only old music I was sending you from Naples? Go to, for an *impressario* who ought to be more rogue than fool, and you are only the latter."

Had Rossini said this to some persons, he would have expected a stiletto in reply;

but the good *impressario* of Venice had "music in his soul," and was not "fit for stratagem and slaughter." Delighted with that which he had just heard for the first time, he pardoned in a man of genius the weaknesses of love.

The expedient thus employed by Rossini at Venice, was certainly carrying things to *extremes*; it was not in his usual manner: but of late years, he has been obliged to have recourse to a variety of expedients. One of these is to produce his operas in different places. He then adds one or two really new pieces; all the rest consists of old ideas served up under a new form. Thus his music, lively and piquant as it is in other respects, wants the feeling of novelty, so essential to the beautiful in music.

On the 4th of October, 1819, Rossini produced the "*Donna del Lago,*" which was sung at the theatre *San-Carlo,* by Signora Pisaroni (one of the least handsome figures that can be imagined), Signora Colbran, Nozzari, Davide, and Benedetti. It may be said that, after the "*Elisabetta,*" Rossini succeeded only by the force of his genius. His principal merit lay in his style, which was

altogether different from that of Mayer and his other contemporaries, and in the wide range of his ideas, which possessed a character entirely new to the public. He enlivened the tediousness of the *opera seria*, and imparted to it a life and animation to which it had before been a stranger. But then the public could not separate Rossini from the general discontent that was felt against M. Barbaja and the Signora Colbran. Impatience at last rose to its height, and made itself heard in a manner that could not be misunderstood. I have seen Rossini quite ill with the hisses that resounded from every part of this vast interior. This, in a man of his natural indifference, and who feels a perfect confidence in his merits, spoke volumes. It took place at the first representation of the "*Donna del Lago.*"

The first scene created a feeling of pleasure. The solitary lake in the land of Ossian, with its interesting inhabitant guiding her solitary boat to the shore, gave a tone to the feelings altogether favorable to the character of the piece. Signora Colbran, guiding her little bark with admirable grace, sung her first air, and very well.

The public was all impatience for an opportunity to hiss, but none was afforded them. The duet with Davide, that followed, was equally well sung. At length Nozzari appeared, in the character of *Roderick Dhu;* he had to enter from the back-ground, and, from the nature of the scenery, was placed at an immense distance from the orchestra. His part began by a strong *portamento di voce.* He swelled his voice into a magnificent burst, that might almost have been heard to the *Strada di Toledo.* But as, from the situation in which he stood, he could not hear the orchestra, unfortunately this burst of voice was nearly half a tone too low. I shall never forget the sudden outcry of the pit, delighted with a pretext to shew their disapprobation: a menagerie of hungry lions let loose upon their prey can convey but a faint image of the scene;

Garganum audire putes nemus aut mare Tuscum.
*Hor.**

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* Hoarse as the winds o'er Garga's woods that sweep,
And loud as roarings of the Tuscan deep.
Translator.

Nothing can convey an adequate idea of the fury of a Neapolitan audience, when either offended by a false note, or furnished with a just pretext for satisfying some ancient grudge. The air of Nozzari was followed by the appearance of a number of bards, who came to animate the Scottish troops to battle by the sound of their harps. This finale for three choirs is evidently an attempt on the part of Rossini to rival the ball-scene in "*Don Giovanni*," with its three orchestras. The military march, with its splendid trumpet-accompaniment, heard in contrast with the chorus of bards, is very striking. This first representation took place on a gala-day; the theatre was illuminated, and the court was not present to place any restraint on the uproarious spirit of the audience. Nothing could equal the extreme hilarity of a number of young officers who filled, *per privilegio*, the first five rows of the pit, and who had drunk deeply to the health of their king, as all good and loyal subjects should do. One of these gentry, at the first sound of the trumpets, began to imitate, with his cane, the noise of a horse in full gallop. The public were

struck with the facetiousness of the idea, and, in an instant, the pit is full of five hundred imitators, who join in this novel accompaniment. The ears of the poor *maestro*, however, found neither novelty nor pleasure in such an addition to his music; it was but too ominous of the issue that awaited his opera, and he sat upon thorns, in expectation of the fate that was prepared for him.

The same night he had to set off post for Milan, to fulfil an engagement, which had for some time been contracted there. We afterwards learnt that, with his usual spirit of gasconade, he had spread the report both on the road and at Milan, that the "*Donna del Lago*" had been applauded to the skies. He thought he was telling a fib, and ought to enjoy all the honours of it; yet all the while, it so happened, he was only telling the truth. The fact is that, on the following day, the public was too candid not to acknowledge the act of injustice into which they had been betrayed; and accordingly, the next evening, the opera was hailed with all the applause which it so justly merits. The trumpet-accompaniment was softened down by diminish-

ing the number of instruments, which on the first evening were really deafening.

I recollect that the same evening, after the opera, the *Principessa di Belmonte* exclaimed; "Oh, if the poor Rossini could but know of his success, what a consolation it would be to him on his journey! How melancholy he must be jogging along at this moment!" Little did we dream of the piece of gasconism he was that very moment playing off on the road.

This opera is so well known, from the effect with which it was given here last season, as to render any analysis unnecessary. The pieces most applauded at Naples were the chorus of Maidens, "*Di, nibaca donzella*;" the little duet "*Le mie barbare vicende*;" the "*O quante lagrime!*" by Signora Pisaroni; and the finale, which is very remarkable and truly original, particularly the quintetto, "*Crudele sospetto*," which has great power and beauty.

In the second act, the parts that excited most admiration, were the terzetto "*Alla ragion deh ceda!*" the air "*Ah! si pera*," and the Romance, which is sung behind the

scenes, *sotto voce,* accompanied by a harp. The effect of this piece is much heightened by the subject of it having been heard, at intervals, through nearly the half of the first act.

The play of the passions is much less lively in this opera than in the "*Otello,*" but the cantilenas are more beautiful. The song is in general more *spianato,* more sustained and simple; for example, in the delicious and tender air "*Ma dov'è colei che accende?*" It was the opinion of the *dilettanti* of Naples, that, in the "*Donna del Lago,*" Rossini had in some degree reverted to the style of his early youth, to the system according to which the "*Demetrio*" and the "*Inganno felice*" are modelled. I here take occasion to observe, that the above operas, and particularly "*Il Tancredi,*" are written in a style that, *to me* at least, appears Rossini's best manner. In them, a just proportion is observed between the harmony and the melody, and expression is never sacrificed to effect. Not that I mean to assert, that "*Tancredi*" presents the best possible ideas, and that it eclipses all the other merits of Rossini. He has since

acquired more depth and energy; but many of his ideas are tinctured by a false system, that robs them of half their effect.

Rossini has devoted but little attention to sacred music; however, this year, we find him composing a grand mass at Naples. It took him three or four days to give the character of church music to some of his most beautiful *motivos*. The Neapolitans found it a delicious treat; they saw pass successively before their eyes, and under a little different form, all the sublime airs of their favourite composer. One of the priests exclaimed, in a serious tone,—"Rossini, if thou dost but knock at the gate of Paradise with this mass, in spite of all thy sins, St. Peter will not have the heart to refuse thee an entrance." This phrase is delicious in the Neapolitan dialect, on account of its grotesque energy.

CHAP. XVI.

"Bianca e Faliero"—"Maometto Secondo"—*Unsuccessful*—"Matilda di Shabran"—"Zelmira"—*Rossini marries Signora Colbran—Goes to Vienna—Anecdote of his reception there—Sentiments of the Germans respecting Rossini—Rossini returns to Venice*—"Maometto" *hissed*—"Semiramide"—*Which is the most beautiful of Rossini's Operas?*—ROSSINI IN LONDON—*Hint to the manager of the King's Theatre.*

We now find ourselves in the stormy period of Rossini's career, and behold him persecuted and persecuting. We see him taking daring liberties with a people the most sensitive upon earth, and who can be touched in no more tender part than that in which their pleasures are in question. We find him attempting, and sometimes succeeding, in deceiving the critical acumen of his countrymen, by passing off upon them his old music for new, and see him visited in return with outrage, and not unfrequently with injustice.

We saw Rossini quit Naples on the night of the 4th of October, amidst a storm of

hisses; on the 26th of December following, we find him bringing out his "*Bianca e Faliero*" in the *Scala* at Milan. It is nearly the same subject as that of Manzoni's tragedy of "*Il Conte di Carmagnola.*" The scene is at Venice. The Council of Ten condemns to death a young general, whose successes have raised their distrust; but *Faliero* (such is the soldier's name) is beloved by *Bianca*, the daughter of the Doge. This part was admirably sustained by Madame Camporese, and that of *Faliero* by the Signora Carolina Bassi, a singer of great promise. The decoration, representing the interior of the Council of Ten, was reality itself. A general buzz of approbation ran round the house, at the sight of the magnificence of this immense and sombre hall, decorated with hangings of purple velvet, and lighted by a few scattered tapers in golden lustres. The costume of the Council was equally imposing; we felt ourselves in the presence of an all-powerful and inexorable despotism. Nothing can be a better commentary on dramatic music than splendid and appropriate decorations. They give a tone to the imagination, and dispose it

for entering upon the land of illusions. Nothing can be a better prologue to the music, than the soft buzz of delight that circulates round the interior of the *Scala* at the rising of the curtain, and the first display of such magnificent decorations.*

As to the music, it was full of reminiscences, and its reception was so cold, as to amount to little short of a failure. The public appeared unusually severe; perhaps the strong situations of the "*Gazza Ladra*" were still fresh in their recollection, and this story appeared tame when contrasted with the former. It has been remarked, that the musician who has borne away laurels of triumph in his art, may be pardoned great faults, and daring violations of rules,—but he must not become feeble: thus, in a hero, we can forgive the loss of a battle, and overlook any grammatical faults in his despatches, but cannot pardon a disgraceful retreat. An air, which was very

* We trust that the justice of these observations will not be lost upon the new Management at the King's Theatre, where the room for improvement in this respect is sufficiently ample.

difficult, and sung with cold correctness by Madame Comporese, did not disarm the severity of the public. It was called the "*Aria di garlanda,*" because *Bianca,* when singing it, holds a garland in her hand. This and a quartetto were the only new pieces in the opera. But the latter, as well as a movement for the clarinet, are among the divinest inspirations of music. I have no hesitation in declaring, that there is nothing in Rossini's works, perhaps not in modern music, comparable to this duet; it is an effort of genius of the highest order. It has all the tenderness, without the deep melancholy, of Mozart.

This piece had scarcely made its appearance, when it was introduced into a ballet, and performed at the same theatre. The same public that had listened to it for months together, were scarcely less delighted with it, in this second form; and the most perfect silence reigned during its performance.

Rossini returned to Naples, for the carnival of 1820, and produced there his "*Maometto Secondo.*" The subject of this opera, like the greater part of those Rossini has

been condemned to work upon, is made up of very poor materials, though the *libretto* is said to be from the pen of *Il Duca di Ventignano,* who passes at Naples for one of the best composers of tragedies in the kingdom. The "*Introduzione*" pleased much, and gave a more favourable augury of the opera than the sequel justified; for it was soon discovered that Rossini had again fallen into his besetting sin, of borrowing from himself without mercy. A hundred passages occurred, which were like the faded charms of a decayed beauty which once enchanted, but have since lost all their magic, and every power of attraction. A terzetto, in the first act, called forth loud and merited applause; as did also a *largo,* in the finale, which is full of beauty; though, from the constant custom Rossini has of introducing such movements at the close of his first act, they assume rather a formal appearance. Some of the most striking effects of music are produced by surprise; but, with respect to these finales, all the world knows what is coming, and is taught, by degrees, to receive it as a matter of course.

The second act was defective in interest, and dragged considerably. In vain did Maometto's janissary bands strive with their noise to keep attention awake: it was all to no purpose. The only thing that excited interest was a farewell *terzetto* between the father, daughter, and rejected lover. Rossini appears particularly to excel in compositions of this class. The cold and obstinate silence which prevailed at the close of the opera, showed the feelings of a disappointed public, who were only prevented from expressing their unreserved disapprobation, by the presence of Rossini, and a respect for his name.

In the carnival of 1821, Rossini gave his "*Matilda di Shabran*," at the theatre *D'Apollone*, at Rome, which was built by the French, and is the only tolerable theatre in this city. This opera introduced to the public the pretty and favorite singer, Cattarina Lipparini. The opinion of the public was, that the *libretto* was execrable, but the music charming.*

In the spring of 1822, Rossini returned to

* This opera has been so lately before the British public, as to render any detailed account of it unnecessary.—T.

Naples, and brought out his "*Zelmira*," which was sung at *San-Carlo*, by Signora Colbran, Nozzari, Davide, Ambrosi, Benedetti, and Signora Cecconi.

The *libretto*, which is from the pen of Tottola, is one of the most weak and insipid of all modern composition of that kind, and the plot full of perplexity. At the time of the composition of this opera, Rossini had accepted an engagement at Vienna, and it is more than probable that, in writing it, the composer had an eye to Germany, for it is quite in the style and taste of the German school. Yet it must be allowed to abound with many beauties, particularly a romance in the first act, which is full of tender and plaintive expression, and pregnant with profound feeling. A terzetto, also in the same act, and a warlike march heard breaking upon the silence of a caverned scene in the second, are full of expression and true dramatic effect. A grand quartetto, towards the close, called down tumultuous applause: it abounds with passion, and sparkles with fancy.

Rossini also composed a *pastorale* for

four voices, entitled "*La Riconoscenza*," which was performed at *San-Carlo*, on the 27th of December, for his own benefit. It was sung by the Signoras Dardanelli, and Cornelli, with Rubini, and Benedetti. Rossini quitted Naples the following morning, and departed for Bologna. On the 15th of the March following, he was married to Signora Colbran. The ceremony took place at Castenaso, near Bologna, where the lady has a little country seat. Meanwhile Davide, Nozzari, and Ambrogi, arrived from Naples, and a few days after they all started together to Vienna, where Rossini had accepted an engagement, and where he was to make his debût with "*Zelmira*."

Many have been the remarks which this marriage has called forth. It is like the match of a man of genius—precisely the reverse of what was to be expected. Signora Colbran is a Spaniard by birth—she can no longer boast of beauty—is said to have lost her voice—is no longer young—and had devoted her early years to Signor Barbaja, the Neapolitan manager, of whom we have before spoken. Rossini is said to

love money—she is rich, and this must have been the temptation. With the fortune he has acquired, and with the prospects before him, Rossini now bids fair to become one of the richest composers the world ever saw. The following distich appeared at Bologna, the day after the wedding, from the pen of some son of Pasquin :

" Eximia eximio est mulier sociata marito :
Venturum eximium quis neget inde genus ?"*

On the 30th of March, Rossini made his debût at Vienna, with the opera of " *Cenerentola.*" " *Zelmira*" had been promised, but, as the former opera had already been adapted to German words, and performed at Vienna under the title of " *Die Aschenbrödel,*" Rossini wished to pay a compliment to the German taste, and expressed a wish that this opera should take the precedence, and be given by the German company. At the rehearsal, he desired the music to be performed in a quicker time than had usually been done, which, however, did not very well accord with the ponderous nature of the German language. When this incon-

* The man of song weds her of song who queen is :
May we not hope a race of young Rossinis ?—T.

venience was pointed out to him, he replied, with the frankness and naïvetè peculiar to him, that "the words with him were quite a secondary consideration; that the music and effect were every thing."—Who durst contradict him?

At length his promised "*Zelmira*" was produced. He attended to all the arrangements of the opera, but declined presiding at the piano, excusing himself with a well-turned compliment to the orchestra, by expressing his confidence that his music was perfectly safe in their hands, and did not require his interference. Nothing could exceed the enthusiasm, with which this opera was received. Not only the master, but also the singers were called for at the close of the piece, to receive the congratulations of the audience.

The next opera that followed was "*La Gazza ladra*," the favorite overture to which was greeted with tumultuous applause, and, what was altogether new in the annals of theatrical usages, the *maestro* was called for, at the conclusion; nor was the opera allowed to proceed till he had made his appearance. The fact is, that on the first representation of this opera in Vienna, in 1819, this overture

had been the cause of a musical war, in which numerous dissertations were printed on both sides. The "*Gazza ladra*" was followed by "*Corradino*," "*Elisabetta*," and "*Ricciardo*;" but "*Zelmira*" remained the favorite opera, and held its course triumphantly through the whole season.

A German publication, of this period, describes Rossini as a well-bred man, of agreeable manners, and very personable appearance, of great gaiety of character, and full of wit and humour. The societies into which he was introduced were charmed with his vivacity, joined to perfectly unassuming manners, which had nothing of the assumption of the master, or the pedantry of the school.

The Germans were, however, not a little astonished at the reputation, which Madame Colbran Rossini had contrived to make in Italy; her voice was feeble; some said it was tuneless, and the proud Senora, the queen of the *San-Carlo*, was in imminent danger of being hissed. But, by a rare contingency, tenderness for the husband saved the wife from being undone.

Among the other honours shown to Ros-

sini, the following must not be omitted, which is strongly indicative of the excess to which a spirit of nationality may be carried. It was Madame Rossini's birth-day; and at the conclusion of the opera, the composer invited the principal singers to supper, to celebrate the festive occasion. Great hilarity prevailed, and the sparkling champagne circulated briskly. At last, a very unusual and encreasing noise was heard in the street. The servants are ordered to see what was the matter, and they return with a report that a great concourse of people had assembled in front of the house, mostly consisting of the composer's countrymen, who were assembled to render him and his bride all "honours due." Rossini proposed to his guests to throw open the windows, and treat this music-loving mob with something to repay them for their zeal and devotion. Accordingly it was done. The piano was thrown open, and he accompanied his beloved Isabella in a scene from "*Elisabetta*." Cries of joy succeeded from below: *Viva, viva! Sia benedetto! ancora, ancora!* Davide and Madame Ekerlin next sung a duet, and afterwards Nozzari gave his *sortita*

(song on his first entrance) from "*Zelmira.*" The delight of the amateurs on the *trottoir* knew no bounds. At last, when Madame Rossini gave the air "*Caro, per te quest' anima,*" enthusiasm was at its height. Mingled shouts arose of *fora! fora il maestro!* loud as the chorus of a thousand trombones. Rossini appears in the balcony, and makes his gracious obeisance to the assembled multitude. The air resounds with *Viva, viva! Cantare, cantare!* The good-natured *maestro* is obliged to comply, and trills, with all his might, his own "*Figaro quà, Figaro la.*" Surely this was enough to satisfy the most unreasonable. By no means,—the mixed *parterre* would willingly, *alla maniera Italiana,* have prolonged this occasional concert till the morning dawn. Not so those above: after having toiled through a long opera, and thrown in a *piccola Academia musicale* gratis, as a kind of make-weight, they thought very properly that, as it was already past the hour when "spirits walk the earth," every good Christian had a right to look for wholesome repose.

Meanwhile, as the crowd below felt no

disposition to disperse, it was judged proper to remove the supper things, and extinguish the lights, which done, the company retreated into a back apartment. The many-headed monster was not, however, to be so easily pacified. At first a sullen silence brooded around, but too ominous of the approaching storm; but, at the sight of the Egyptian darkness that reigned in the apartments, and announced the precipitate retreat of their favorite and his party, a dull murmur was heard to arise, which swelled by degrees into a tremendous *crescendo*, not unlike some of those of which this master is so fond of giving specimens in his works. At last, all was fury, tumult, storm, and execration; and, no doubt, the windows would have felt the effects of the general disappointment, if some of the guardians of the night, aided by a party of the police, who by this time had been apprised of the uproar, had not succeeded in dispersing these musical rioters.

Thus terminated an adventure, new to Vienna, but which is no unusual thing in Italy, where, if a composer is unsuccessful in a piece to-night, he is pursued to his

home with hisses, hooting, and execration; while a few nights after, if he happens to please the mob by something to their taste, he is conducted home in procession, by the light of flambeaux, and amidst the crash of Janissary music. The writer of this has often been witness of such scenes, as well in Milan and Turin, as in Rome and Naples.

We now come to a period, in which we find insurrection in the pit, redoubled intrigue behind the scenes, tumult, scandal, a war of pamphlets, and diplomacy itself, called in to the aid of music. Rossini had entered into a contract with the *impressario* of the *Fenice* theatre in Venice. Six thousand francs were ensured to Signor Rossini, and four thousand to Madame Colbran Rossini, upon condition that he should bring out two operas during the Carnival; one old and one new, and Madame was to perform in both. All Venice waited for these operas with the utmost anxiety. "*Zelmira*," performed at Naples, had long been promised, and the company at the *Fenice* was already occupied in rehearsing it, when the rival theatre

of *San Benedetto* announced the representation of the same piece.

The two theatres immediately contested the right to this opera, and the disputes grew so high that the government interfered. A stormy contest ensued, at the close of which it was decided that *San-Benedetto* had the legitimate right to "*Zelmira;*" and it was represented at this theatre, to the great detriment of the *Fenice,* which had been at considerable expense, and after all found its hopes frustrated.

Rossini was not allowed to remain neutral during this scene. He was assailed by the angry manager; and, to remedy an evil, which it appeared impossible not to impute, in some degree, to him, he proposed the representation of the "*Maometto,*" which we have seen condemned at Naples, but whose fame he promised to re-establish by re-composing the whole second act. This promise given, he departed for Verona; remained there a considerable time; spent his leisure very agreeably among his friends and admirers, and wrote a cantata in honour of the Emperor of Austria, which was performed during the Congress: but

not a note did he re-write of the promised second act. The manager's indignation knew no bounds; the public, fearful of being disappointed of their pleasures, began to take an active part in the business; and the report was spread that Signora Colbran had lost her voice. Things did not wear a better aspect in the inside of the theatre: the rehearsals became scenes of discord. One day Galli, the celebrated bass, took an affront, and set off in the middle of the second act. Rossini, in disgust, broke up the meeting and withdrew. The manager appealed to the public authorities, and Rossini was placed under arrest.

Under all these terrible auspices the fatal day approached. An irritated public filled the theatre at an early hour; cries resounded from every side that the manager had re-produced an old condemned opera, and that Rossini had neglected to fulfil his engagements. The overture was hissed, the first scene hooted, and the second drowned by the impromptu accompaniments of the pit, whose discords,—if we may be pardoned a musical phrase,—no art could resolve. Silence could only be obtained

when clamour and fury had howled themselves to rest, and were tired out by their exertions.

The enemies of Rossini had circulated a report through the house,—a report, by the way, that had but too much truth in it,—that Rossini had only altered one miserable trio, and had simply introduced some shreds of his other works; and towards the close of the opera an uproar arose, of which no image in nature could convey an adequate idea. Galli and Madame Colbran Rossini drank the bitter cup of humiliation to the lees. Poor Sinclair, our English tenor, partook of these attentions, and was overwhelmed with hisses and outrages. From seven in the evening till three in the morning, this tempestuous scene endured, and fears were entertained for the safety of the scenery, and the decorations of the house.

Rossini endeavoured to make his peace with the Venetians the following Carnival, by calling his talents into action in the opera of "*Semiramide*," which was performed at the theatre *della Fenice*, and sung by madame Colbran Rossini, Rosa Mariani, a de-

lightful *contr'alto*, Sinclair, Galli, and Lucio Mariani. A passage in the overture tended much to conciliate the audience, and obliterate the former unfavourable impression, and this feeling was strengthened by an air of Mariani's, which was full of beauty and sweetness. The next piece that called forth applause was a duet between this lady and Madame C. Rossini, besides which an air of Galli, and a terzetto between him and the two above-mentioned ladies, were received with tumultuous applause. Rossini was called for at the end of the second act, and came forward with a humble obeisance to receive this token of reconciliation.

Critics speak highly of the movement, with a chorus, that forms the finale of the first act; but, upon the whole, I cannot help thinking that, in this opera, Rossini has been guilty of an error in geography. What, as a whole, was coolly received at Venice, would have been hailed with enthusiasm at Konigsberg or Berlin. Rossini has been but little studious of delighting the lovers of the simple; we search in vain for those melodies so flattering to the ear, and so soothing to the heart:

"Il canto che nell'anima si sente."*

Nothing is found more difficult than to answer the question:—Which is the most beautiful of Rossini's operas? As to which is to be preferred, the simplicity of the style of "*Tancredi,*" or the luxuriancy and superabundant ornaments of "*Ricciardo e Zoraida,*" changed into so many *motivos;* this is quite another question. What I now speak of, is the difficulty of forming a general opinion of their comparative merits; and whence can this difficulty arise?

In the overture of the "*Barbiere*" there is a very charming little passage. Very well: but then the same pretty passage has already served as a *motivo* in "*Tancredi,*" and, still later, Rossini has found it very serviceable in his "*Elisabetta.*" In the last instance, he has given it in the shape of a duo, in which latter form it is more beautiful than in either of the two former. We may, therefore, think ourselves fortunate if we hear this charming passage, for the first time, under the form of a duo, though still we ought to regret the circumstance that threw it in our way. But, if already familiar to you in the

* The song that in the inmost soul is felt.

"*Barbiere,*" or "*Tancredi,*" no wonder that in the form of a duo it should be found tiresome.

It would be amusing enough to see a correct list of all the pieces of music in Rossini's works, that are really different from each other; as well as another list of the pieces *founded* on the same ideas, with a reference to the duet or air in which such ideas are employed in the happiest manner. In the circle of my acquaintance at Naples, I know twenty young men, capable of drawing out such a list in a couple of days, with as much ease as a critique would be got up in London on the eleventh Canto of *Don Juan,* or a profound article at Paris upon public credit. There are a hundred young men at Naples whom you meet in society, who, if it came to the point, could write you an opera like "*Ser Marc Antonio,*" or the "*Barone di Dolsheim,*" in six weeks at the farthest; the only difference is, that, instead of six weeks, these operas cost the *maestri,* who have received a regular education in the *conservatoirs,* only fifteen days.

I have heard my friends at Naples say, that nothing in the world would be more

easy than to revive fifty *chefs-d'œuvres* of Paisiello and Cimarosa. The first thing is to wait till they are completely forgotten; this may be safely reckoned upon in 1825. Of all the operas of Paisiello, *La Scuffiara* is the only one now played at Naples. Then let some happy and skilful manœuvrer, some retired master, who can no longer write any thing original on account of his health, and the exertion it requires, M. Pavesi for instance, take the "*Pirro*" of Paisiello, leave out the recitatives, enforce the accompaniment, and add new finales. The principal contrivance will be how to transform the most original piece in each act into a finale. Who knows but that, in following up such a path as this, we may stumble upon some of the most popular airs of our great living masters. What an affliction it would be to me, if in this manner they should happen to disinter the beautiful quartetto in "*Bianca e Faliero !*"

At the pass to which things have come, nothing would be of such essential service to Rossini as one or two decisive failures: it would teach him a humbling, but a useful, lesson. Unfortunately I know of no other

place that is worthy of hissing him, but Milan or Naples; in any other place it would be rancour, and not dispassionate criticism.

After having received the homages of the lovers of music in Paris, Rossini has gone to fulfil his engagements in London. It has been remarked that, in this capital, Rossini, at a distance from the ordinary theatre of his glory, will have but too many facilities of passing off much of his old music for new; his natural failing will gain redoubled strength.

To stimulate him into energy, and into an attempt to be original, the *impressario* of the King's Theatre ought to propose to him to reset the *libretti* of "*Il Don Giovanni*," or the "*Matrimonio Secreto*." Let not his success in the "*Barbiere di Seviglia*" be forgotten, in the composition of which Rossini felt himself brought into competition with Paisiello.

CHAP. XVII.

On Rossini's Style.

Before concluding, it will be proper to say a word on the peculiarities of Rossini's style.

Good music may be considered as nothing more than our *emotion.* The pleasure created by it seems to arise from its power of leading the imagination through a series of exquisite but evanescent illusions. These illusions are not calm and sublime, like those of sculpture, nor tender and pensive, like those of painting, as exhibited, for example, in the works of Corregio.

The chief characteristic of Rossini's music is an extraordinary rapidity, which does not permit the mind to indulge in those profound emotions and soothing reveries that the slow and sustained movements of Mozart are so calculated to awaken. Yet this velocity is accompanied by a sparkling freshness that calls up involuntary delight. Hence it is, that all other music appears heavy and wearisome after that of Rossini. Were Mozart to make his debût at the pre-

sent day, such, in all probability, is the judgment that would be formed of his music. To be pleased, we must listen to his music for a fortnight together; but he would be hissed on the first day. If Mozart maintains his ground against Rossini, if we frequently prefer him, it is because he is strong in that antiquity which he has already attained by anticipation, and in our recollection of the pleasure we have derived from his works.

But, if the music of Rossini is never heavy, it is of a kind to weary by long repetition. But this ever-varying brilliancy is perhaps the chief reason why his compositions leave no profound impressions behind them. They may be said, in the words of Shakspeare,

> "To be too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
> Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
> Ere one can say, it lightens."

The most distinguished amateurs of Italy, who have been in the habit of hearing it for these dozen years, have for some time past begun to require novelty, and are crying out for some change.

If such be the case now, what will it be twenty years hence, when the "*Barbiere*"

shall be as long known to the public as the "*Matrimonio Secreto*" or "*Il Don Giovanni*" is now?

The misfortune of Rossini is, that he treats the passion of love as a mere affair of gallantry. With him this passion is not love, but a continuous, brisk, and sparkling imitation of it. The consequence is, that he is never melancholy, and what is music without a shade of pensiveness?—

"I am never merry when I hear sweet music,"

—says that poet among the moderns, to whom, above all others, it was given to know the secrets of the passions,—the author of Cymbeline and Othello.

In this *siècle expédétif*,—this expediting age,—Rossini has at least one advantage, he never arrests our attention long together.

In a drama in which a composer endeavours to express human passions, and all the more delicate shades of feeling, a considerable degree of attention is necessary in order to feel the emotions which he wishes to produce. It is scarcely necessary to add, that even attention alone will not be sufficient, if the minds of the hearers be not susceptible

of profound emotion. Now, on the contrary, in the compositions of Rossini, the greater proportion of the airs and duets resemble short brilliant concertos* for the display of the voice, rather than vehicles for the expression of sentiment; and, consequently, but a very slender degree of attention is required to derive pleasure from them; in most instances, the mind has little or nothing to do in the affair.

I know I shall be called upon to justify so bold an assertion. I therefore refer the amateur to that most perfect of operas, the "*Matrimonio Secreto.*" In the first scene of the first act, *Carolina* is seen happy with her lover. She makes a tender reflection on the future bliss that awaits them: "*Se amor si gode in pace.*" Simple as these words are, they have produced one of the most beautiful musical phrases that exists in the world. *Rosina,* in the "*Barbiere di Seviglia,*" finding in the *Count Almaviva* a faithful lover, instead of the wretch who was to barter her into the arms of another; *Rosina,* in this moment of ecstasy, in one of the most affecting situa-

* Particularly in the operas written at Naples for Signora Colbran.

tions in which it is possible for the human mind to be placed, instead of yielding herself up to the impulse of impassioned tenderness, wanders into a thousand *fioriture*, a thousand unmeaning roulades and misplaced cadences. Rossini found he had not the power to be tender, and therefore he was determined to be surprising. Signora Bellochi, the first *Rosina*, had a powerful voice, and Rossini wrote this little ornamental concerto to set it off to the best advantage. But here is no excuse: the happiness in question is of a nature that cannot possibly be mistaken for mere joy. This is the principal defect of Rossini's second manner, when he adopted the unfortunate idea of writing all those embellishments in full, which should be left to the feeling and extemporaneous execution of the singer. It was thus that he fell into the error of converting an accessary into a principal. It cannot be denied that these ornamental passages possess much beauty, a seductive and enlivening freshness, and a rapidity that hurries the hearer agreeably along.

Viganò, whom Italy, till very lately, presented to the world as a proof that she

was still the queen of the fine arts, adapted his pantomimical tragedies, called ballets, to Rossini's airs; for instance, *Otello*, *La Vestale*, *Mirrha*, &c. Viganò, having taken care to select only the most beautiful of his airs, the consequence unfortunately is, that, after seeing one of his ballets, the opera appears tame; and, to counteract this evil, the composer is obliged to be constantly endeavouring to produce new and striking effects. Nothing could be imagined more ruinous than this to the native grace and simplicity of music.

Another unfortunate circumstance for Rossini is, that the semi-serious opera has come much into fashion, which has led him to adopt a kind of amphibious style, neither *buffa* nor *seria*. Every one in Italy agrees that the serious opera is dull, and, besides, it is a species of composition that requires the utmost perfection in the performance. One serious opera in the year, at the *Scala* or *San-Carlo*, is found to be sufficient. In the present deplorable state of Italy, it would afford some kind of relief to find cheerfulness at the theatre; and yet, as, by a singular regulation, the prices of admission to

the *semi-seria* are higher than those of the *buffa*, the directors will bring forward nothing but the former. This is inauspicious for Rossini, whose genius is eminently fitted for the gay, the pleasurable, and the voluptuous.

The system of variations has often led Rossini to copy himself; like all thieves, he hoped to conceal his larceny. After all, why should not a poor *maestro*, who is obliged to compose an opera in six weeks, ill or well, in the vein or not, be allowed to have recourse to such an expedient in moments when inspiration "comes not, though invoked." Mayer, for instance, and others whom I could name, do not copy themselves, it is true, but they frequently chill us into apathy, which is invariably followed by "nature's kind restorer, balmy sleep." Rossini, on the contrary, allows us neither peace nor repose; we may get out of patience with his operas, but it is impossible to doze over them: be the impression altogether new, or only a pleasing reminiscence, still it is one pleasure followed by another. There is never any void, as in the first act of the "*Rosa bianca*," for example.

All the world acknowledges the fecundity of Rossini's imagination, and yet nothing is more common than the complaint that he repeats himself, that he copies himself, that he wants invention, &c. No doubt there is much truth in all this; but I would take the liberty of proposing the following questions.

1. How many principal pieces was it usual for former great masters to introduce in each of their works?

2. To how many of these pieces did the public pay attention?

3. Among these pieces, how many have survived, and became favorites beyond the walls of the Opera?

Paisiello saw, perhaps, some twenty or thirty principal pieces of his hundred and fifty operas meet with general favour. Rossini could easily reckon upon a hundred in his thirty operas, really different from each other. A simpleton, who sees a group of negroes for the first time, imagines that they all resemble one another: the pleasing airs of Rossini are negroes to the simpletons of our day.

The fault of the public is, that they wish to hear every thing at once; they wish to

have their *pennyworth for their penny*, if I may be allowed the vulgar phrase: they expect every thing to be of equal force; it is necessary for them, that a tragedy should be entirely composed of passages of effect, like the "*Qu'il mourût*," of the *Horaces*, or the "*Moi*," of the *Médée*. Such unreasonable pretensions are in opposition to the very nature of the human heart. No man possessed of any sensibility for the fine arts, could find any pleasure in two sublime pieces following each other in immediate succession.

At the first opening of the scores of Rossini, it might be imagined that the difficulties presented in the execution of the songs, would allow them to have but a very limited numbers of interpreters: but it is soon discovered, that his music offers a multitude of means to please, which, even when executed with half the ornaments written by Rossini, or with the same embellishments differently arranged, has still the power to please. A singer of mediocre talents will, if but possessed of a certain degree of *flexibility* of voice, be able to execute the pieces of this master with success. The seductive nature of

his cantilena, which is never hard nor violent through excess of force; the vivacity of the rhythm, and the sweetness of the accompaniments, produce of themselves such a feeling of pleasure, that, whatever modifications the singer may, through the deficiencies of his voice, be obliged to make in the ornaments of Rossini, his music, though thus mutilated, always produces a piquant and very agreeable effect. It was not so formerly, in the days of an Aprile and a Gabrielli;* every possible latitude was then given by the master to the singer, and every opportunity was furnished him of displaying his talents. If a singer was of mediocre talents, and possessed no other qualification to recommend him than that of mere flexibility of voice, he could not hope for success.

The truly beautiful in song began with Pistocchi, in 1680; his pupil Bernacchi made great improvements in 1720, but it was under Pacchiarotti, in 1778, that this art was brought to perfection.

* Gabrielli could never sing well, except when her lover was in the theatre. A hundred other stories, of the same nature, are told in Italy, of her caprice and singularities. She was a native of Rome.

These and subsequent great singers, for instance Aprile, Farinelli, Ansani, Babini, and Marchesi, were indebted for their glory to the system of the ancient composers, who, in certain parts of the opera, gave the singer only a canvass to work upon; and he, to be faithful to the *motivo* of the master, gave it with the utmost simplicity, and was content to introduce his ornaments in the last twenty bars of the piece. What is more, there was not one of these great singers to whom his contemporaries were not indebted for two or three admirable female singers. The history of a Gabrielli, a De' Amicis, a Banti, and a Mara, furnishes us with the names of the celebrated soprani from whom they learnt the secrets of their art. Many of the female singers of the present day, Signora Colbran, for instance, are indebted for their talents to Signor Velluti.

It was in the execution of passages of the *largo* and *cantabile spianato* kind, that the talents of these great singers shone forth conspicuous. Now these are precisely the kind of cantilenas that Rossini so sedulously banished from his operas, after he

had vitiated his taste at Naples, and adopted what is called his *second manner*. Formerly a singer spent six or eight years in forming his voice for the perfect execution of the *largo*: the patience of Bernacchi is proverbial in the history of the art. But, since Rossini has become the arbiter of taste, no one ever thinks of singing the *largo* ill or well; and yet this is the song that touches the soul. The song of Rossini pleases the mind without ever wearying it; compared to it, the *largo* movement will appear languid and heavy. The talent required for singing a grand *rondo* of Rossini, that in the "*Donna del Lago*," for instance, is a hundred times less than that required for doing justice to a grand air of Sacchini.

The shades in the *portamento di voce*, the art of sustaining the voice, and spreading it equally over the whole surface of the *canto legato*, the art of taking the breath insensibly, and without breaking the long vocal period of the ancient airs, formerly constituted the most difficult and most essential part of execution. The more or less brilliant flexibility of the organ

was reserved for *gorgheggi;* in other words, was never employed in the merely luxuriant and ornamental, but in the tender and expressive. A cadenza of some twenty bars was always reserved, at the close of the air, for displaying the singer's powers of execution.

Even those among the most sincere of Rossini's friends have reproached him, and with reason, of having encroached upon the territory of song; of having diminished those means by which it was enabled to hold dominion over the heart, and of having deprived the singer of those opportunities for an extemporaneous display of his powers, which were so frequent in the days of Farinelli, a Pacchierotti, &c. and which enabled them to work those wonders, which can only be effected by allowing due scope to the energies of the voice.

The revolution effected by Rossini, has been fatal to the originality of the singer. Of what avail is it to the artist, to lavish his labour in the fruitless task of rendering the public sensible, in the first place, to the *individual* and *native* qualities of his voice; and

secondly, to the peculiar expression which this individual mode of feeling can impart to it? In the operas of Rossini and his imitators, they are condemned to the mortification of never finding a single opportunity of making the public acquainted with qualifications which it has cost the labour of years to attain. Besides, the habit of finding every thing invented,—every thing written in the music they are to sing,—tends to destroy all spirit of invention, and check every impulse of a creative fancy. All that composers demand now-a-days of the artist, is a *mechanical* and *instrumental* execution. The *lasciate me fare* (leave that to me) the usual phrase of Rossini to his singers, has come to such a pass, that the faculty is not even left them of filling up a simple *point d'orgue;* they find every thing ornamented after Rossini's particular manner.

To the great singer of a former period, was left the invention of the greater part of the ornaments of song, all that Pacchiarotti used to call "*i vezzi melodici del canto* (the melodial luxury of song.) When

Crescentini sang the air "*Ombra adorata! aspetta,*—he gave such a shade of spontaneous feeling to the varied inflexions of his voice, as the impulse of the moment called forth; it appeared *at the instant he was singing it,* that such ought to be the sentiment of an impassioned lover, who is about to rejoin the object of his affections. Velluti, on the contrary, in giving the same words, has another shade of feeling; he takes a different view of the subject; with him it is a melancholy and pensive reflexion on the common fate of the two lovers. No master, however transcendant his abilities, could ever succeed in painting those innumerable and delicately varied shades which form the perfection of Crescentini's manner,—shades that are infinitely diversified according to the state of the singer's voice, or the degree of illusion or of enthusiasm by which he is animated. A singer to attain perfection in singing must yield to the inspirations of the moment. A great singer is a being essentially nervous; this is quite the opposite temperament to that required for a player on the

violin.* In fine, it is impossible for a master to be acquainted with all the resources of a singer's voice, which can be known only to the possessor, who has spent twenty years of his life in forming it, and studying its powers. Let an ornament be executed, I do not say ill, but feebly and without spirit, and its charm is instantaneously destroyed. You were in heaven, and in an instant you find yourself in a box of the opera,—nay, what is worse, perhaps in the midst of a singing school.

* Paganini, the first violin-player of Italy, and perhaps of the world, is still a young man. His ardent spirit did not attain to excellence by mere patience and the instructions of the Conservatoire; its origin is to be traced to an unfortunate amour, on account of which he was doomed to languish many long years in prison. Amidst solitude and privation, which might have been exchanged only for the scaffold, he had no other resource than his violin. He learnt the secret of translating his soul *into sounds;* and his long captivity allowed him leisure to become a perfect master of this language. We must not hear Paganini when he contends with the violins of the North, in grand concertos, but when he is in the vein, and plays his divine capricios. It scarcely need be premised, that these capricios are a hundred times more difficult than any concerto.

Should chance present to Rossini an actress, young, handsome, full of soul and intelligence, who never in a single gesture departs from the most perfect simplicity, at the same time that she is faithful to all the forms of the *beau-ideal;* if to talents so extraordinary as an actress, Rossini were to find united a voice which every moment awakens recollections of the great singers of the good old school, a voice capable of giving effect to the most simple recitative, and which, in an air, has power to move the stoutest hearts;—should chance present such an actress to Rossini, we should, doubtless, see him shake off his habitual indolence, as if by miracle, and study, in good earnest, the voice of Madame Pasta. Inspired by her talents, he would feel the former ardour revive with which he first entered upon composition, and return to those simple, but expressive melodies, with which he first began his career of glory. After having heard her in the prayer of "*Romeo e Guiglietta,*" that touchstone for the talents of a singer; after having observed the fine shades which she can impart to her *portamenta di voce,* the power of her accentuation, the admirable

skill with which she can unite and sustain a long musical period; I have no doubt but that he would consent to sacrifice to her a portion of his system, and consent to be more economical in the use of that multitude of little notes by which his cantilenas are overcharged.

Fully convinced of the feeling and good taste of Madame Pasta, of which she gives such unequivocal proofs in the *fioriture* of her song, and persuaded how much more certain the effect of that pleasure is which is produced by the native feeling and *spontaneous* invention of a singer, Rossini would doubtless leave the embellishments of his song to the genius and inspiration of this great singer.*

Madame Pasta's voice is of very considerable compass. It extends from A, above the bass-cliff note, to C flat, and even to D sharp in *Alt*. She enjoys the rare advan-

* Our author's anticipations are likely to be realized this season, at the King's Theatre; and no doubt Rossini will profit of the opportunity afforded him of studying Madame Pasta's powers, and of creating something new for a voice that has already done so much justice to some of the most beautiful of his music.

tage of being able to sing music set for a *contr'alto* as well as a *soprano* voice. Though possessed but of little or no science in music, I should not hesitate to declare that the true character of her voice is a *mezzo-soprano*. The master who wishes to do justice to her voice should set the general tenor of her airs according to this modification of its powers, and employ all the other resources of her beautiful treble *en passant*, and as occasion may require.

We have to notice another very remarkable peculiarity in Madame Pasta's voice; it is not all of the same *metallo* (metal or stamp) as the Italians term it, a peculiarity that is found to afford one of the most powerful means of expression of which a singer of ability can avail herself.

By the Italians, a voice of this kind is said to consist of many *registers*, that is, different qualities of sound in different parts of the scale. It is the same with certain musical instruments; the clarionet, for instance, has two *registers*, in which the lower sounds do not appear to belong to the same genus as the upper. When the aid of great art, and, above all, of great sensibility, is not called in to regulate the employment of these

different registers of the vocal organ, they appear nothing else than inequalities, and produce a hardness of effect destructive of all musical pleasure. A Todi, a Pacchiarotti, and a great number of singers of the first order, have shown how these apparent disadvantages may be converted into real beauties, and made to produce powerful and original effects. The history of the art would even seem to prove, that a voice equally strong and unalterable in all the notes of its compass, is not the best calculated for the purposes of impassioned song. Such a voice can never produce those veiled, and, in some sort, stifled, sounds, which paint, with so much fire and truth, certain emotions of profound agitation and impassioned anguish.

It is through the astonishing facility with which Madame Pasta unites her *voce di testa* (head-voice), with that of her *voce di pelto* (breast-voice), that she is enabled to produce such a multitude of piquant and agreeable effects. To enliven the colouring of a phrase of melody, or, in an instant, to change the shade of the expression, she employs her *falsetto* even in the chords of the middle of her diapason, or alternates the

notes of the falsetto with those of the breast. She can employ this artifice with the same facility both in the middle and in the upper tones of her *breast-voice*.

Again, Madame Pasta's *voce di testa* possesses a character altogether different from that of her *voce di pelto*; it is brilliant, rapid, pure, light, and of admirable flexibility. With this part of her voice, she can, in descending, so *smorzare il canto* (diminish the song) as to render the ear doubtful whether it still hears a sound or not.

In the art displayed in this delightful modification of voice, Madame Pasta makes daily advances towards perfection. In this manner, she is enabled to impart a new *musical* colouring to the sentiment, not by the accent of the words, and in quality of a great tragedian, but by the ever-varying shades of the voice, and in quality of a great singer.

Moderate in the use of embellishments, Madame Pasta never employs them but to heighten the force of the expression; and, what is more, her embellishments last only just so long as they are found to be useful. In her singing, I have never met with any of those ornaments which, like eternal gossips, who think they have never said

enough, weary the patience of the hearer, and lead the singer from her subject. I leave it to the public to name, even among certain singers reputed great, who often run into this fault, and sometimes in a manner altogether amusing to those who are not too provoked to laugh. I have no wish to disturb the pleasures of those demi-connoisseurs by whom these amusing things are applauded with such transport. The failing of the singer, and the applauses of the hearers, spring from the same source—a *want of soul.* There is no better test for discovering an amateur of an *acquired* taste. When I see such unmeaning ornaments applauded to the skies, it reminds me of the anecdote of a certain well-known nobleman, who was closeted with a certain great king on important political business. The nobleman held a paper in his hand, and was running on with a long *rigmarole* upon a subject by no means amusing; the good king, however, was very merry over the matter: the fact is, that he saw the noble peer was holding the paper the wrong side upwards. The gift of reading is not given to all the world.

With Madame Pasta, the same note in

two different situations can hardly be called the same note. In this one word, is summed up the whole secret of the sublime art of singing. I have witnessed twenty representations of "*Tancredi*," and yet the voice of the singer followed so closely the inspirations that breathed spontaneously from her heart, that it could never be said to be exactly twice alike. These shades of feeling, varied at every repetition of the same character, are the *infinitely little*, which no master can reach by mere notation; and, should he try to write it, as Rossini has done since his journey to Naples in 1815, it would be found that such and such a grace, such and such an ornament, would not have suited the individual state of this singer's feelings on such and such an evening; therefore, it is impossible she could have excited such transports of delight in executing that particular ornament on the evening in question.

The vulgar herd of amateurs are not pleased with a passage unless given with the *customary* ornament, be such ornament executed well or ill. To such persons I have no excuse to offer for my enthusiasm. It would take me many pages to note down all the creations of Madame Pasta. What

I understand by *creations* is certain means of expression, of which it is more than probable that the master who wrote the notes never once dreamed. As, in love, a language is oft times spoken which would be scarcely intelligible if coldly committed to paper, because

"Thought meets though ere from the lips it part;"

I imagine the same thing takes place with respect to song.

Like all voices, that of Madame Pasta meets, from time to time, with certain inconvenient *positions*, which it finds a difficulty in surmounting. These occasions are rare, but they serve to make us long still more to hear her, for once at least, in an opera written expressly for her voice. How great a treat such would an opera be from the pen of Rossini, could he but bring himself to write *conscientiously* for such talents! I think this singer destined to make the fortune of any composer, who, in consulting her powers, would also be consulting his own fame. Perhaps the star of Rossini himself might be destined to grow pale before such a composer. She is sublime in the *simple* style, and this is the side on which the glory of the author of "*Zelmira*" must be attacked.

Those bigoted *dilettanti*, who have sprung up during the reign of Rossini, or, if I may so say it, are sons of the revolution which he has caused, will pardon me for having dwelt thus long upon the advantages which expression, or, in other words, which the pleasure of the spectator, would gain, from a due degree of respect shown to the rights of the singer. There is not less diversity in the human voice, than in the human countenance; and, great as this diversity is in voices when *speaking*, it becomes a hundred times more striking in the voice when *singing*. In the system of Rossini, this variety, this surprising diversity, of shades is not allowed to appear. All his voices are made, more or less, to sing the same music; hence the art must necessarily be impoverished.

From the restrictions thus laid upon the artist, arises the custom so common in Italy, for singers to travel with a collection of what are termed *arie di baule* (baggage-airs.) Even Crivelli and Velluti are not above adopting this practice, and never travel, of late, without the "*Isolina*" of Morlachi, an opera which they give every-

where. Whatever opera these singers have to perform in, they always discover the secret of introducing their *arie di baule*, which are subjects of everlasting pleasantry in the Italian theatres. By this expedient singers are enabled to escape from the trammels of a particular system, and attain the great end of all the arts—that of *imparting pleasure.*

This system of the *arie di baule* is, after all, a happy invention, not only with regard to mediocrity of talent in a difficult art, but also with respect to the limited resources of many small towns of Italy, which, in spite of the poverty of their musical budget, are enabled, by means of these airs, to get up two or three very tolerable operas every year. For example, in October 1822, I heard a very charming opera, at Varése, a town in Lombardy, not larger than Saint-Cloud, and whose inhabitants are remarkably obliging towards strangers.

Yet, whatever system Rossini may have adopted, still through the force of genius, imagination, and *rapidity* of manner,* he

* A caricature lately appeared at Rome, which excited considerable interest. A chariot is seen driving

never becomes tiresome. The misfortune is, that circumstances have obliged him to write for particular voices, and some of those voices in their decline. The consequence is, that his music is, for the greater part, a tissue of ornaments, which were very well in the persons for whose peculiarities of voice they were written; but what is their effect in another theatre, and under other circumstances? An attempt to execute them through the medium of singers, whose voices want the necessary capabilities, brings us to that state of mediocrity, which is intolerable in the fine arts in general, but particularly in music.

furiously along: Rossini is on the coach-box, lashing his four-in-hand with wild impetuosity: within the vehicle are seen the great composers, Piccini, Guglielmi, Paisiello, and Cimarosa, who are looking out of the window, and exclaiming "*Ferma! Ferma! dove vai?* (Stop! stop! where are you going?) T.

CHAP. XVIII.

Opinions and Character of Rossini.

Rossini adores Cimarosa, he speaks of him with tears in his eyes.

The man he respects the most as a learned composer, is M. Cherubini, of Paris. What might not this great man have accomplished, if, in his fondness for German harmony, he had not lost all love, or rather all sensibility, for the melody of his country?

Rossini was known to have expressed his alarm at the popularity of Mayer. Mayer, in return for this proof of esteem, testifies the highest regard for his young rival, and this with all the honest open-heartedness natural to a Bavarian. Rossini entertains a very high opinion of M. Pavesi, who has written pieces of considerable power. I have heard him sincerely lament the misfortune of this composer, who, though in the flower of his youth, is obliged to remain inactive, through an ill state of health.

I have heard the author of the "*Barbiere*" declare it as his opinion that, after Fiora-

vanti, nothing further could be done in that kind of *buffa* style, which is called *nota e parola*. He added, that nothing in the world was more absurd, than to attempt any thing new in *buffa* music, after the perfection to which it had been carried by Paisiello, Cimarosa, and Guglielmi. Men have changed too little since the time of Guglielmi, continued he, to render it possible that a new kind of *beau idéal* could be received by them: half a century must elapse before this can be effected, in order that the new exigencies of a fresh race of men may dispose them to receive it. I saw him maintain a furious contest on this point with a pedant of Berlin, who thought he should gain the day, by opposing the phrases of Kant, to the *sentiments* of a man of genius.

It would be well if, on this point, the critics of the north would re-consider the subject more attentively, before they condemn the gaiety of the southern music, and look with a supercilious air upon a playfulness that appears to them little less than childish buffoonery. If they are insensible to the effect of such airs as "*Signor si, lo*

genio e bello!" of the pedant in the "*Scuffiara*" of Paisiello, or the "*Amicone del mio core*" of Cimarosa; at least, would it not be prudent and philosophic to be silent on the subject? Let the north occupy itself with Bible Societies, and plans of utility and wealth. Let an English peer, rolling amidst his millions, pass a whole day in gravely debating with his steward upon a reduction of five-and-twenty per cent., in the rents of his numerous farmers. The poor Italian, who sees his chains riveted, and the tyranny which he endures redoubled by the influence of those pious and humane souls, knows what he ought to think of so much virtue. He enjoys the arts: he knows how to relish the beautiful, under all its various forms; and, in this respect, nature has been bounteous to him, even to profusion—he regards the melancholy man of the north with more of pity than of hatred. "What would you have?" said one of the most amiable of the inhabitants of Venice to me, hanging his head in dejection; these grave and pious people lord it over eight hundred thousand barbarians, who prefer our climate to their snows.

Our sole revenge is to see these good people dying with ennui."

Rossini has the highest veneration for the talents of Mozart, but, like the rest of his countrymen, considers him rather in the light of an incomparable symphonist than of an operatic composer. Whenever they speak of him, it is as one of the greatest men that ever existed; but, even in his "*Don Giovanni*," they find the defects of the German school, that is, too little *song for the voice*, and too much for the clarinet and basoon.

I have heard Rossini speak in a very serious tone—which is not saying a little for him—of poor Orgitano. He declared that he was the only rising genius, of whose talents he should really have stood in awe. The world fondly looked forward to this amiable young man, as a successor to Cimarosa, when, in 1800, he was cut off in the flower of his youth, a new example of the danger of premature genius.

As for Paisiello, Rossini speaks of him as the most inimitable of men. He was a genius of that simple and natural order, whose manner almost defies imitation. Paisiello

was able to produce the most astonishing effects, with the greatest possible simplicity of melody, harmony, and accompaniment. Rossini was accustomed to say, that, after Paisiello, nothing more could be done in simple melody. After musing for an hour, we find we have stumbled upon Paisiello, and copied him even before we are aware of it. Rossini is well read in music; he can discourse learnedly on the works of every master. He has but to play a score once over upon the piano, to know it entirely by heart. He is therefore familiar with all the music written before his time, and yet no other than clean white music-paper is to be seen in his chamber.

Nothing can be more agreeable than the conversation of Rossini, at least to an Italian taste. He has a mind all fire and vivacity, starting from subject to subject, and viewing every thing in a strong, though frequently, grotesque point of view. A manner so rapid and discursive would be more astonishing than agreeable, were it not enlivened with a fund of anecdote. The everlasting restlessness of his career during twelve years, composed, as he himself

has expressed it, of eternal *goings and comings;* his constant intercourse with singers—the most gay and thoughtless of beings, as well as his continual introductions into high and elegant society, has afforded him abundant opportunities of seeing life in all its shades and varieties. The envious and splenetic would sometimes spoil the pleasure of society, by calling in question the truth of some of his assertions. His reply was; "What a fool should I be to invent and be guilty of fibbing! I, who have been all my life among singers and actresses! All the world knows their caprices, and the greater the name I contrived to gain, the greater the caprices I had to undergo. I have seen in my chamber, and should have seen even in my anti-chamber, if I had had one, the greater part of the rich amateurs of Italy, who generally end by falling in love with the *prima donna,* and by being drawn into a still worse scrape, in undertaking the management of the theatre. They say I have been honoured by the smiles of beauty; it may be so, but I have had to suffer great mortifications in return. I have been used to change my place of abode, and the list of my friends, three times every

year, during my whole life; and, thanks to my name, I have, in every place I visited, been honoured with the notice of all whose notice was worth any thing, and have been upon intimate terms with them four-and-twenty hours after my arrival!"

Rossini has the misfortune of not respecting any thing but genius. He never compromises any thing, he never waives his joke: so much the worse for the unhappy object of it. And yet his joke is never a malicious one; he is himself the first to laugh heartily at it, and smooth down its asperity. Being invited to the house of a certain cardinal at Rome, he was asked to sing, but a *caudatario* (a train-bearer) first of all waits upon him, to request he would sing as little as possible on love subjects. He immediately began to sing all sorts of *polissonneries,* in the Bolognese dialect, which nobody understood, then burst into a hearty laugh and changed his theme. Without this fertility and quickness of mind, he never would have been able to write all the works he has done. Recollect that he has always lived up to his little means; that he would have his amusements, cost what they

might. The consequence is, that he has been always poor, and had nothing to spare to obtain any aid in his compositions, and that nevertheless, before the age of two-and-thirty, he has produced five-and-forty operas and cantatas.

Rossini has a wonderful talent for mimicking all who come in his way. He is in the habit of calling forth shouts of merriment, by imitating the manners and gestures of such of his friends as are remarkable for any simplicity or peculiarity. Vestris, the first comic actor of Italy, and perhaps of the world, says that he would have been sure of great success if he had taken to the stage. Rossini can mimic De'Marini to a wonder, who is considered as the first actor in Italy: in witnessing it, one begins by laughing at the imitation, and finishes by being moved at the truth of the resemblance. In 1820, Rossini took a part in a comedy *bourgeois*, which was got up by several young persons of the first distinction. De' Marini was among the number of the spectators, and confessed, as did every one else, that Rossini performed his part to a wonder.

He is also a composer of verses, many of

which have been inserted in the *libretti*, and he has frequently furnished the poet with many useful hints, both with regard to sentiment and situation. He is full of his drollery, even when he himself is the subject. When he has finished an air, he will declaim it before the friends that surround his piano, in all the burlesque of passion, adapting to it ridiculous verses composed on the spur of the moment. He then bursts into a hearty laugh: "*E però, in due anni questo si canterà da Barcelona à Pietroburgo: gran trionfo della musica!* (and yet, in two years, this will be sung from Barcelona to St. Petersburg: a great triumph this for music.) When a friend was reckoning the number of theatres on which his operas were performing at the same moment, and enumerated seventeen in Italy, and seven out of Italy,—London, Vienna, Berlin, Lisbon, Barcelona, &c. Rossini exclaimed; "*Sono il più giovine e il più fortunato di maestri*" (I am the youngest and the most fortunate of composers).

Rossini's facility in composing is not one of his least extraordinary qualities. We have seen many instances of this during the course of these memoirs, and Ricordi, the

principal music-seller of Italy, and who has made a large fortune by the sale of this composer's works, has said that some of the finest airs of the "*Gazza ladra*," were composed in the space of an hour, in the room at the back of his shop, in the midst of twelve or thirteen music-copiers, some of whom were dictating aloud to others the music which they had to note.

Rossini has been wise enough to meddle but little in politics. He steered his course with great prudence and caution through the stormy period of 1814 and 1815. Yet, wary as he appears to have generally been, he was once so far thrown off his guard as to compose a Patriotic Hymn, the tone and temper of which is altogether of the *liberal* cast. This ebullition of Transalpine feeling seems to have been forgotten or overlooked under the new state of things. It was not so, as we have already had occasion to remark, with poor Cimarosa. A few years before, he had, for a similar offence, been thrown into prison, and exposed to a variety of annoyances and persecutions.

Before his marriage with Signora Colbran, who is said to have brought him an income

of twenty thousand livres, Rossini never bought but two suits of clothes a-year. As for the rest, he had the good fortune never to think of prudence; indeed, what would be prudence in a man like him but a *fear of falling off in his abilities?* This feeling is only for the feeble minded and the poor in spirit. Rossini, secure in the resources of his genius, lived from day to day, without ever thinking of the morrow. Poverty was no affliction to him; give him but a piano and a simpleton to throw off his jokes upon, and he was happy. Wherever he appeared, whether in the dirty parlour of a common inn, or in the drawing-room of a prince, the name of Rossini was sufficient to attract all eyes; the first place was always given up to him, or, rather, that which he occupied became the first. He saw himself as much an object of attention, as the great man who could afford to spend his hundred thousand francs per annum.

To conclude, an attentive observation of Rossini's manner shows that nature had gifted him with a genius for music of the *mezzo carattere*. Ill-luck threw him in the way of Signora Colbran, the queen of the *San-Carlo*; and, what is still worse the

same ill-luck so ordered it, that he fell in love with her. Had it been his good fortune to meet with some *buffa* singer, Signora Gafforini, for instance, in the flower of her youth and the pride of her talents, instead of tormenting us with the plagues of Egypt, he would have continued to write more operas in the style of "*La Pietra del Paragone*," and the "*Italiana in Algeri*." But let us not be unjust towards a great man; let us learn to set a due estimate on his genius, whatever may have been the restraints imposed upon his talents by his own passions, the peculiarity of his situation, or the bad taste of his contemporaries. Do we esteem Corregio less, because he was condemned by the barbarous taste of the canons of his time to paint cupolas, or to astonish by gigantic figures wonderfully fore-shortened, *di sotto in su?*

Lively, light, piquant, never dull, seldom sublime, Rossini seems expressly constituted to throw into extacies persons of moderate powers and second-rate talents. Far as he is surpassed by Mozart, in tender and melancholy expression, and by Cimarosa in the comic and impassioned style, he still remains unrivalled for vivacity, rapidity, piquancy,

and all the effects derived from these qualities. Never was an opera *buffa* written like "*La Pietra del Paragone*;" never was an opera *seria* written like "*Otello*" or "*La Donna del Lago*." "*Otello*" bears no more resemblance to the "*Oracj*," than it does to "*Il Don Giovanni*." It is a work of a distinct and individual character. Rossini has a hundred times painted the pleasures of successful love; and, in the duet of "*Armida*," in a manner never before known. Sometimes he has been absurd, but he has never shewn a want of mind, not even in the air at the end of "*La Gazza ladra*." Equally incapable of writing without faults, and without a great display of genius, Rossini is certainly, since the death of Canova, the first of living artists. What rank will be assigned him by posterity?—This is a question I am unable to answer.

A judicious critic has remarked, that Rossini has already written too much; or, rather, has written too fast: he has exhausted his powers, or anticipated his strength, and ought now to remain *fallow* for a time. His genius is unquestionably great; but he has been as much over-extolled by his friends, as underrated by his enemies.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST

OF THE

WORKS OF GIOACCHINO ROSSINI,

BORN, AT PESARO,

THE 29TH OF FEBRUARY, 1792.

IN the month of August, 1808, Rossini composed, at the Lyceum of Bologna, a symphony, and a cantata, entitled "*Il pianto d'Armonia.*"

1. "DEMETRIO E POLIBIO." This is Rossini's first opera. It is said to have been written in the spring of 1809, though not performed till 1812, at the theatre *Valle*, in Rome. It was sung by the tenor Mombelli, and his two daughters, Marianna (now Madame Lambertini,) and Esther, who is still a celebrated singer, and engaged the present season (1823) at the King's Theatre.

2. "LA CAMBIALE DI MATRIMONIO," 1810, *farza:* (by *farza* is understood an opera in one act,) written at Venice for the *stagione del' autunno.** This was the first of Rossini's operas performed on any stage. It was produced at *San-Mosè.*

* I employ the Italian names of their theatrical seasons: they differ from our own, and consequently a translation would be incorrect.—It is scarcely necessary to inform the reader that at each season the operatic companies are renewed. The season of the *Car-*

3. "L'Equivoco Stravagante, 1811, *Autunno.* Composed at Bologna, for the theatre *del Corso.*

4. "L'Inganno Felice," 1812, *Carnivale.* Written for the theatre *San-Mosè,* at Venice. This is the only one of Rossini's early works that has retained its place on the stage. It contains a terzetto that has been much celebrated.

5. "La Scala di Seta" *farza,* 1812, *Primavera.* Performed in the *San-Mosè,* at Venice.

6. "La Pietra del Paragone," 1812, *Autunno,* at the *Scala,* in Milan. In this opera, Signora Marcolini made her first appearance.

7. "L'Occasione fa il Ladro," *farza,* 1812, *Autunno,* in the theatre *San-Mosè,* at Venice.

8. "Il Figlio per Azzardo," *farza,* 1813, *Carnivale:* at the same theatre.

9. "Il Tancredi," 1813, *Carnivale:* at the grand theatre *della Fenice,* at Venice. An *opera seria,* the first of the kind written by Rossini, with the exception of "*Demetrio e Polibio,*" which was only performed by the Mombelli family.

10. "L'Italiana in Algeri," 1813, *estate.* Performed at the theatre *San-Benedetto,* at Venice.

11. "Aureliano in Palmira," 1814, *Carnivale.* Sung in the theatre of *La Scala,* at Milan. The first act is set much higher than the second. The reason

nivale commences the 26th of December; *la Primavera,* on the 10th of April; and *l'Autunno,* on the 15th of August. In certain cities, the periods of *l'Autunno* and *la Primavera* differ: at Milan, there is sometimes an *Autunino,* (a little autumn season. As to the Carnival, it invariably begins the second day after Christmas.

of this is, that Rossini had proceeded thus far when Davide fell ill with the small-pox, and was prevented from singing; the second act was written for Luigi Mari. The company by which this opera was sung was one of the most remarkable that has been known for many years. Villuti obtains great success. The opera experiences a failure: Rossini's pride is hurt, and he thinks of changing his style.

12. "Il Turco in Italia," 1814, *Autunno:* at the theatre of *La Scala*, at Milan. Obtains but a moderate success.

13. "Sigismondo," 1814. In the theatre *della Fenice*, at Venice.

14. "Elisabetta," 1815, *Autumno;* Naples. Sung at *San-Carlo*, by the Signora Colbran, Signora Dardanelli, Nozzari, and Garcia. This was the *debût* of Rossini at Naples.

15. "Torvaldo e Dorlisca," 1816, *Carnivale:* in the theatre *Valle*, at Rome. Obtains but little success.

16. "Il Barbiere di Seviglia," the same season: at the theatre *Argentina*, in the same city.

17. "La Gazzetta," 1816, *estate*. Performed at the theatre *dei Fiorentini*, at Naples.

18. "L'Otello," 1816, *inverno*. Sung in the theatre *del Fondo*, (a handsome round theatre, which is subsidiary to that of *San-Carlo*,) by Signora Colbran, Nozzari, Davide, and the bass, Benedetti.

19. "La Cenerentola," 1817, *Carnivale*. Performed in the theatre *Valli*, at Rome.

20. "La Gazza Ladra," 1817, *Primavera*, Milan.

Sung in the *Scala*, by Madame Bellochi, Monelli, Galli, and Signora Galianis.

21. "Armida," 1817, *Autunno*, Naples. Sung, at the theatre *San-Carlo*, by Signora Colbran, Nozzari, and Benedetto. Contains a celebrate d duet.

22. "Adelaide di Borgogna," 1818, *Carnivale*, Rome. Performed in the theatre *Argentina*.

23. "Adina, Ossia il Califfo di Bagdad." Rossini composed this piece for the opera at Lisbon, where it was performed in the theatre *San-Carlo*.

24. "Mose in Egitto," 1818, Naples. Sung, during Lent, in the theatre *San-Carlo*, by Signora Colbran, Nozzari, and Porto, whose powerful bass voice is displayed to great effect in the part of Pharoah.

25. "Ricciardo e Zoraïde," 1818, Naples: and sung, during the *Autunno*, at *San-Carlo*.

26. "Ermione," 1819, Naples. Sung, during the Lent season, at *San-Carlo*. The *libretto* is an imitation of the *Andromaque* of Racine. Rossini aimed at an imitation of the style of Gluck. The only prominent sentiment of this opera is anger. Obtains but a very moderate success.

27. "Odoardo e Cristina," 1819, *Primavera*, Venice. Sung, at the theatre *San-Benedetto*, by Rosa Morandi, Carolina Cortesi (one of the prettiest actresses who has appeared on the stage for many years,) and the two Bianchi.

28. "La Donna del Lago," 4th October, 1819, Naples. Sung, in the theatre *San-Carlo*, by Signora Colbran, Signora Pisaroni (a charming voice, but one of the least handsome figures that can be imagined,) Nozzari, Davide, and Benedetti.

29. "Bianca e Faliero," 1820, *Carnivale*, Milan. Sung, at the *Scala*, by Carolina Bassi (the only singer whose voice resembles that of Madame Pasta), Camporese, Bonaldi, and Alex. de Angelis.

30. "Maometto Secondo," 1820, *Carnivale*, Naples: at the theatre *San-Carlo*.

31. "Matilda di Shabran," 1821, *Carnivale*, Rome: at the theatre *D'Apollone*.

32. "Zelmira," 1822, Naples, *inverno*. Sung, at the theatre *San-Carlo*, by Signora Colbran, Nozzari, Davide, Ambrosi, Benedetti, and Signora Cecconi.

33. "Semiramide," 1823, *Carnivale*, at the grand theatre *della Fenice*. This opera was in the German style, and sung by Signora Colbran Rossini, Rosa Mariani, an excellent *contr'alto*, Sinclair (the English tenor,) Galli, and Mariani.

Rossini has devoted but little attention to sacred compositions; we know of no others than the two following:

1. "Ciro in Babilonia," an oratorio, 1812. Composed at Ferrara, for the Lent season, and performed, at the *Teatro Communale*, by Signora Marcolini, Elisabetta Manfredini, and Signora Bianchi.

2. "A Grand Mass," composed, in 1819, at Naples.

Rossini has composed many cantatas, but I know of no others than the nine following:

1. "Il Pianto d'Armonia," 1808; performed in the Lyceum of Bologna. This is Rossini's first attempt. The style resembles the weaker parts of "*L'Inganno Felice.*"

2. "Didone Abbandonata;" written for Signora Esther Mombelli, in 1811.

3. "Egle e Irene," 1814; composed at Milan for Madame *Principessa Belgiojoso*, one of the amiable protectresses of Rossini.

4. "Teti e Peleo," 1816; composed for the occasion of the nuptials of her R. H. the Duchess of Berri. Sung, at the theatre *del Fonda*, at Naples, by Signora Colbran, Giroloma Dardanelli, Margherita Chambraud, Nozzari, and Davide.

5. "A Cantata" for a single voice; composed in honour of his Majesty the King of Naples, and sung by Signora Colbran, at *San-Carlo*, the 20th Feb. 1819.

6. "A Cantata;" performed before his Majesty Francis I. Emperor of Austria, the 9th of May, 1819, when this prince appeared for the first time at the theatre *San-Carlo*. It was sung by Signora Colbran, Davide, and Rubini.

7. "A Patriotic Hymn;" composed at Naples, in 1820. Another Hymn, of the same kind, but of very opposite politics, composed at Bologna, in 1815. For the same offence Cimarosa had, a few years before, been thrown into prison.

8. "La Riconoscenza," a *pastorale* for four voices, performed at *San-Carlo*, the 27th December, 1821, for Rossini's benefit.

9. "Il vero Omaggio," a cantata, executed at Verona, during the Congress, in honour of his Majesty the Emperor of Austria. It was sung at the theatre *degli Filarmonici*, by Signora Tosi, a young and beautiful singer, the daughter of a celebrated advocate at Milan, and by Velluti, Crivelli, Galli, and Campitelli.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page	4,	line 26,	for 1812,	read 1802.
	6,	— 8,	— *et*,	— *e*.
	51,	— 8,	— affably,	— amicably.
	52,	— 11,	— *Italiano*,	— *Italiana*.
	62,	— 25,	— *caraltere*,	— *carattere*.
	76,	— 8 and 21,	read *col veturino*, (with the driver,) a mode of travelling peculiar to Italy.	
	79,	— 2,	for Danti,	read Dante.
	80,	— 23,	— summed,	— summoned.
	101,	— 16,	— scala,	— *Scala*.
	102,	— 18,	— *Turco di Italia*,	— *Turco in Italia*.
	140,	— 14,	— *Zitte zitte*,	— *Zitti, zitti*.
	152,	— 16,	— Giorgone,	— Giorgione.
		— 19,	— Stradelli,	— Stradella.
	153,	— 11,	— bravadoes,	— bravos.
	159,	— 12,	— *cerentola*,	— *Cenerentola*.
	241,	— 17,	— *libretti*,	— *libretto*.
	259,	*note*,	— of,	— by.
	261, 262,	22, 7.	— *pelto*,	— *petto*.
	265,	— 8,	— though,	— thought.

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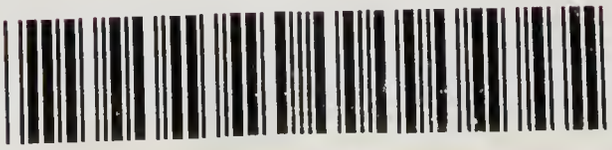
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